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Maurice Rubinoff

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Final Transcript Maurice Rubinoff

PORTRAITS OF THE PAST: THE JEWS OF PORTLAND

The Jewish Bicentennial Oral History Program

Dr. Konnilyn G. Feig, Director

September 1, 1977

Commissioned by: The Jewish Federation of Southern Maine

The Maine Jewish Bicentennial Oral History Program

PORTRAITS OF THE PAST: THE JEWS OF PORTLAND

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Project Dates:

June 1, 1976 to September 15, 1977

PARTICIPANTS IN THE ORAL HISTORY

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17. Arnold Goodman
18. Mrs. Arnold Goodman (Dorothy)
19. Julius Greenstein
20. Morris Isenman
21. Harry Judelshon
22. Mrs. Max Kaplan (Ethel)
23. Jules Krems
24. Mrs. Meyer Lerman (Ethel)
25. Mrs. Charles Mack (Cynthia)

26. Harold Nelson

27. Mrs. Harold Nelson (Mildred)

28. Arnold Potter

29. Mrs. Rebecca Rice

30. Maurice Rubinoff

31. Louis Seavey

32. Barnett Shur

33. Mrs. Barnett Shur (Clarice)

34. Bertram Silverman

35. Israel Silverman (Dean)

36. Rabbi Harry Sky

37. Jerry Slivka

38. Mrs. Ben Troen (Gertrude)

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40. Louis Weisberg

41. Judge Sidney Wernick

42. Mrs. Sidney Wernick (Charlotte)

43. Mrs. Lester Willis (Rita)

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* Deceased since interview

August, 1977

The Oral History Study

A Note to the Reader from the Director:

Background to the Study

Sometime in the early summer of 1975, a group of Jewish leaders appointed by the Jewish Federation of Southern Maine as a "Jewish Bicentennial Committee" met together at the home of Rabbi Sky. National and State Bicentennial planning was at its peak; and some Jews wanted the Jewish community to do something to emphasize the heritage, the presence, the tradition, or the contributions in Maine over the 200 years of a distinctive culture and religious community. They knew from heresay that the Jews had come early to Maine, formed significant communities and had made and were making a considerable impact on the past, present and future of the State. But what should they do? The American Bicentennial theme, "Heritage and Horizons," seemed to echo the Talmudic words: "Know whence you have come and wither you are going." So many possibilities existed, and the suggestions flowed freely. Should the plans be comprehensive and cover the entire State or should they emphasize only the larger communities? Should the program, whatever it became, be aimed at increasing the historical and cultural understanding of the general community, or should it be a kind of re-exploration, re-examination, reminder for the diverse Jewish community? Ought it take the form of some gift which a grateful Jewish community could present to the State which had so recently served as a haven or opportunity for all of their immigrant parents and grandparents? And what vehicles should it use - theatre, music, lectures, exhibits, discussion groups, dialogues? Whatever was done would have to be inexpensive, because the Federation Program Funds were already committed to a continuing project which by consensus the entire community agreed had an urgent priority - the resettlement in Portland of Russian Jewish families, fleeing from the

modern form of Soviet persecution. The Federation had always participated fully in national and international projects, and the Refugee Program received its usual alert and committed attention. So the Committee deliberated, argued, pondered, debated.

Finally, a member of the group hesitatingly suggested the sponsorship of a book - which would detail the entire history of the Jews of Maine. No information was available on the Jews of Maine with the single exception of a brief book, Portland Jewry, written by Ben Band in 1955, sponsored by a newly formed Jewish Historical Society, and published locally. Meant to be a beginning step in helping the Jewish community learn about itself, the book essentially tried to pull together the chronology of events in the formation of the Portland community and its institutions, and to identify some of the participants and leaders in that extraordinary development. The beginning step was a valiant one, but it ended there as did the Historical Society. The Portland Jews were too busy doing, building, creating, and helping Jews across the world. It was not yet the time for reflection, for stocktaking, for a thorough examination of the ROOTS of the community. But now, perhaps the time and energy had to be taken, lest the history disappear, never to be reclaimed; and the rich tradition never be transmitted accurately to the children and to the community.

Rabbi Sky mentioned that the American Jewish Committee was suggesting, in fact, encouraging, a series of Oral History Projects across the country, emphasizing that a well conceived multifaceted reconstruction of the past could surely help to create a balance, an awareness of the unfolding story of the American Jewish experience. Perhaps that thrust should be seized upon in Portland. But no one really knew what oral history meant, and additionally, who would do it? There were no Jewish historians in the State of Maine. Rabbi Sky alerted the Committee to the unusual fact that the Dean of Arts and Sciences

at the University of Maine at Portland-Gorham was a scholar of the Holocaust; and as an Associate Professor of History had initiated courses in Nazi Germany and the Holocaust. Perhaps Dr. Konnilyn Feig could be approached. Rabbi Sky knew that Dean Feig had a heavy schedule in her position; that she would never allow her additional commitment to the teaching of the Holocaust to be tampered with; and that in whatever free time she managed to find, she was writing her own book on Hitler's concentration camps - the capstone of fifteen years of research in Europe. It looked hopeless, but the Committee asked the Rabbi to try. And he persevered. And Dean Feig found herself volunteering her free time to create and direct the project.

When I entered the picture, I had the same overwhelming reservations which the Committee had already expressed. I had little time, and my interest and commitment centered on the Holocaust. Where would I ever find the space for such an enormous project, and who would help? We had no graduate program in Liberal Arts at the University. Where would I get the trained assistance I would need? I met with the Committee, outlined the limits of what could be done, and explained that the project could never be a book, but a re-beginning, another first step, which could be built upon in the succeeding years, and resulting perhaps, someday in a full and real history of Maine Jewry.

It would be an oral history folklore of Portland Jewry; but widened to use the group as a microcosm of Maine Jewry, an example of some kinds of experiences of American Jewry, a renewed acquaintance with the Old World Culture, and a picture of the often-repeated American immigrant story. It would result in a set of final transcripts, made available to the entire reading public. Thus, a small study, a beginning, with wide implications, centering in Portland but suggesting a state-wide impact, a re-examination for the Jewish community and a first reading understanding for the general community, a part of a picture

puzzle for an entire nation, a gift - to the Jewish community and to the Portland community. To my surprise, the Committee and the Federation voted to sponsor the project. I finally agreed to do it for two reasons. When I came to Portland, the Jewish community had been very good to me and had invited me to the Synagogues, the organizations and the homes to talk about the Holocaust. I felt some gratitude. But far more important, I felt a sense of shock when I, too, discovered the absence of any real research and history on one of Maine's most significant immigrant groups. I, too, felt the sense of urgency to re-begin before it really was too late.

Oral History as a Research Discipline

Oral History concerns itself with conservation of a special kind. It conserves the intimate knowledge and experience of humans who have made significant contributions to the life of the time, to a group, to an area, or who have been ideally posted to observe the major events and developments. These humans may be leaders and movers of history, such as Kennedy, Kruschev, and other notables. But oral history taken from those who "made history," only touches the tip of the iceberg when understanding of human cultures and the fabric of civilization is at issue. Perhaps, then, of even greater significance are oral histories taken from groups of ordinary human beings - men and women, known primarily to their neighbors, and perhaps in their towns and states, through whose lives have flowed the currents of an historical age; and whose reactions and understandings determine a collective impact upon a cultural grouping and a time; or upon whom a collective impact of a time and a culture can be measured, evaluated, analyzed, pondered.

The ways of life characteristic of earlier America are rapidly disappearing, but there are persons still alive today who remember them

vividly. Their memories will not be preserved by writing historical memoirs. Oral history projects have attempted to utilize individual recordings, which are admittedly fragmentary and highly personal, but when taken together provide a fund of color, detail, and incidents valuable for future historical research. Roots, centers, beginnings, road signs - all are critical ingredients to any portion of America's colorful culture, and to the essentials of every human being's possession of knowledge of his own individual and group past. And here it is that the necessity for an oral history project centering upon Jewish life in Maine reaches the critical level.

The Jews in Maine

That Jews have been deeply involved in the religious, educational, political, cultural, intellectual and economic life of the State of Maine is one of the best-kept secrets in historical and sociological literature. And Maine is one of the few states in America to be devoid of any major study of one of its important cultural influences. Since 1800 at least, Jews have been living in Maine, and since 1829 with the formation of a Jewish Community in Bangor, some Jewish community life has existed. By 1866, Jews had begun to settle in Portland in noticeable numbers. For nearly 100 years, then, Jews have been making a considerable contribution to and impact upon the state at every level and in every area.

The Jerusalem of the North - the term used so frequently in the past to refer to the Portland Jewish Community. Almost all of the Jews who immigrated to Portland came from Eastern Europe - from Poland, Russia, Latvia, Lithuania - and they brought with them the rich Ashkenazen Orthodox religious and cultural traditions. Orthodoxy found a new home in Portland, in a transplanted form, and held its strength and oneness far longer than most communities in the U.S.

Early twentieth century Portland might be described for the Jews as a community of eastern European shtetl survivors, a pious Orthodox community with several synagogues, central in the lives of the community members. Formal education played a minimal role in the lives of their parents, yet most of the children are learned in the study of the Talmud and graduated from college or comparable institutions. Here we have an unusual phenomena: parents are immigrants, starting out as peddlers or small shopkeepers, and in one generation, the children are college graduates. These college-educated men and women began in the Twenties and Thirties to question traditions which seemed to them troublesome in a modern world. In America, the land of freedom, of relief from pogroms and Russian Army conscription, where the streets were "paved with gold," the wall of Orthodox piety of Portland's Jews began to show cracks as these men and women struggled to educate and provide a better standard of living for themselves. Many had to break the holiness of the Sabbath to work.

Institutions had to be created. In the decade from 1920 to 1930 the Jewish Home for the Aged was built to accommodate family members who could no longer be cared for by their families. In the decade from 1930 to 1940 the idea of a new Jewish Community Center, with a gym, social rooms, kosher kitchens, and sauna and bathing facilities, culminated in the dedication of the present Center in 1938. Throughout the Forties and the Fifties this Center was the focus of family, social and athletic life and the focus of all Jewish functions in the city of Portland.

The winds of Conservativism and Reformism bypassed Portland and it was not until the decade from 1940 to 1950 that a demographic migration from the inner city to the outskirts of Portland, and a shared belief by many that options to Orthodoxy had to be created, resulted in the formation of Temple Beth El, as a Conservative Congregation. The Conservative movement wanted to conserve

that which was appealing in Orthodoxy, and to bring those who were no longer practicing Judaism back into a religious atmosphere. That decade also saw the organization of the Jewish Federation, and its international concern in the aftermath of the Holocaust and the birth of Israel. The funds raised to help Israel during those eventful years into the Fifties are impressive for a community which has relatively little Jewish wealth.

Jewish people succeeded during the next two decades in breaking down some of the barriers to those of their faith in clubs, organizations, professions, institutions, and geographic areas which had previously excluded them. The need for the construction of a new Orthodox Synagogue in the Temple Beth El area became clear during the early Fifties; and the Orthodox Shaarey Tphiloh Hebrew School and Synagogue on Noyes Street was erected. The Newbury Street Synagogue, Etz Chaim, and Anshe Sfaard maintained their separate identities, although many of the congregation members of Newbury Street became members of the new Synagogue. During the Sixties the Community Hebrew School was created.

Today Orthodoxy and Conservativism exist today side by side, strong, active enriched by each other. In the baggage which the immigrants, the founders of the Portland community and those who followed brought with them were two unflinching commitments and enduring dreams - education and public service, unfaltering, regardless of the cost. And the story which emerges is one of involvement and the mutually beneficial changes which come out of the tensions and reciprocal relationships between Maine society and Maine's Jews as individuals and as a community.

The Study

This transcript is only one of forty-four. It presents a portrait of a family, a story of generations, in America and in Europe. The reader would be doing himself a disservice to focus only on this transcript . All forty-four

volumes should be read, because they tell a different story - the story of a remarkable community, a courageous people. Each volume is a family story and one small part of a community folklore history. The full set of final transcripts will be readily available to the Jewish community in the Temple Beth El Library and to the public, in the Portland Public Library. In addition, a professional Permanent Photographic Exhibition containing mounted pictures of each interviewee and pictures of all of the buildings and places significant in Portland Jewish History has been presented to the Federation. It will reside in Temple Beth El.

The enormous project itself was completed under the Coordinator, Lisa Wilhelm, with two years of committed, continuous and volunteer help from a few undergraduate students trained by the Director and the Coordinator, and a few gentile and Jewish community volunteers who worked with incredible energy and dedication. Behind it was the unfailing sponsorship of the Jewish Federation. And, of course, central to it all are the human beings who are the study, the men and women who invited us into their lives and homes, and who so openly and compassionately shared their thoughts, their honest assessments, their feelings and intuitions, their remembrance of factual events, their hopes and their fears concerning the development of this exceptionally strong and traditionally Orthodox Jewish community over a period of seventy-five years, and its development in the future.

Contained within their words is an intricate web of Jewish concerns which bear significance not only to the present and future generations of this community, but also to the broader realm of American Jewry. The project raised as many questions as it answered, questions of considerable scope which could affect American Judaism in the future: What does being

Jewish mean to you? Of what significance is Israel to you in your life? How do you feel about intermarriage and assimilation, and how will these facts affect Judaism? What trends have you observed in the Jewish institutions in this city, and where are these trends leading you? What have been the changes in your Jewish family life - which traditions, cultural and religious, remain with you and which have been discarded?

The majority of interviewees are over the age of fifty, born of immigrant parents or immigrants themselves, who carried with them to Portland the traditions of the Eastern European shtetl and who have watched that ghettoized secure life in the "Jerusalem of the North" be slowly supplanted by a more modern, urbane existence of the present-day Jews.

They represent a heterogeneous group but with a strong linkage. Each is an inspiration, and each reflects commitment, dedication, humaness. As individuals, each has something to say about himself, his life, his hopes, his dreams, his thoughts, his sadnesses. And if the group is placed together, the picture that this gathering together paints, patch-work quilted as it may be, kaleidoscopic as it may seem, has an artistic potential for richness, continuity, color, form and spirit.

Those of the older generation miss the piety of the "Jerusalem of the North": the days when on a Friday afternoon the smells of the Sabbath baking emanated from Jewish neighborhoods; when the men gathered after the daily minyan within the confines of their synagogues to share their thoughts, discuss business, or play cards; when Bar Mitzvah celebrations were simple, with a little herring and kichel, and pure; and when the younger generation shared their lives with the older generation. Today the traditional, Orthodox ways are melded with a modern age, and Jews realize that they can be both good Americans and good Jews. The Jewish Family Services has successfully

brought about, during the past three decades, a transition from the old belief that Jews should take care of their own to an enlightened view that Jews should take advantage of community services. Citizens are now aware of Jewish contributions to the general community, and the "Jewish tokenism" of past decades is disappearing. While there are as many definitions of Judaism as there are Jews, ranging from ultra-Orthodox to minimal identification with any aspect of Judaism, there is little to support the belief of one of our interviewees that the American Jew "will sink into the fading sunset." Many view Judaism, to some degree, as a continuum which has survived for centuries. Many also talk about it as a cultural identification, a combination of religion and common ancestry in terms of the Bible and mystical in the sense that it is inexplicable. Judaism is more than good works and ethics. It includes that mystical, spiritual something which ties all Jews from all times together in their diversity - that mystical tie which all of our interviewees struggled to define when speaking of their own Judaism.

To everyone the state of Israel has some degree of significance. "A Homeland." "A fountainhead with which all Jews can identify." "A place that worries about Jews - just in case." "A unifying structure of Judaism." "The yearning of a 2,000-year-old culture." "It shows the world that Judaism lives." "Israel made the Jew an important human being in today's world." "A paradise built from a wasteland." These are just a few of many reasons why Israel must survive for the Portland Jews.

It is with a depth of gratitude that I express my final thanks to these forty-four individuals who have allowed all of us from the outside to view for the first time a picture of the Jerusalem of the North, to understand

the background and traditions of this community, and to realize the commitment and contribution, past and present, of Portland Jewry.

Dr. Konnilyn G. Feig
August 25, 1977

JEWISH BICENTENNIAL ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEWEE:	Mr. Maurice Rubinoff
INTERVIEWER:	Dr. Konnilyn Feig
PROJECT ASSISTANTS:	Lisa Wilhelm Martha Browne Cynthia Mack
DATE:	October 18, 1976
PLACE:	53 Codman Street Portland, Maine
TIME:	7:15 p.m.

MAURICE RUBINOFF

Maurice Rubinoff has a strong Lithuanian background. His fraternal Lithuanian grandfather had seven or eight brothers who are scattered all over the globe. His father, born in Lithuania in 1895, came to America in the early 1900's when he was 18-years-old. He and a large part of his family settled in Pennsylvania, leaving no relatives in the Old Country. The grandfather decided to come to Portland, Maine and began a small grocery store. Maurice Rubinoff's father established the first IGA store in Portland.

Mr. Rubinoff's mother, born in Lithuania, came to Boston alone at age 18. She originally came to Portland because Rabbi Chaim Shohet of the Newbury Street Shul was her first cousin and his son, Moshe Shohet, her second cousin. They brought her to Portland to meet Maurice's father, and they married in 1915. After she married Mr. Rubinoff, Maurice's father brought all of his wife's family from the Old Country. His grandfather became the Rabbi at Etz Chaim for two years and then moved to Boston to be the rabbi of a Shul.

The elder Rubinoff died a sudden death in 1931 at age 36. His wife kept the business going for the next ten years and brought up four children. The Rubinoffs began as a family of immigrants who spoke only Yiddish but all four children graduated from college. Maurice received a BS in Business Administration from Boston University. One sister graduated from the University of Maine and is a dietician. Another graduated from business school, and yet a third graduated in dietetics from the University of Massachusetts. Maurice was born in 1917. His mother, ten years after his father's death, left for Boston with his three sisters. Maurice stayed in Portland. Then he, too, moved to Boston, worked in Connecticut and went to Boston University. Just

before he went into the Service, he married Leah Sapiro from Portland. She holds a BA in Psychology from Smith, an MA in Social Work from St. Louis University and was a social worker in Boston when she met Mr. Rubinoff. Today she is manager of Family Day Care for the State of Maine. Her mother, born in Russia, and her father, born in New York City, were leaders in Portland's Jewish Community. Her mother was one of the founders of the Council of Jewish Women, and her father was a member of the first Board of Directors of the Jewish Federation and the first Board of Directors of the Jewish Family Services.

Maurice Rubinoff, a member of the Army Ordnance, was part of the troops which liberated Buchenwald. After liberation, he was involved with the survivors and the DPs in Amberg. By long distance he formed a Portland project of food and clothing parcels. His wife on the Portland end, along with her father, organized an assembly line which produced packages for the whole Amberg DP community. Maurice, in Germany, aided the DPs for many months and became their friend. His efforts are mentioned in I.F. Stone's book, Underground to Israel; and in the past 20 years, he and his wife have participated in several reunions in America with those survivors whom they helped in the early days after the war.

After the service, Maurice Rubinoff finished his degree at Boston University. In 1946 he came back to Portland. His father-in-law, Mr. Sapiro, had owned a wholesale candy business for 50 years and he went to work for him as a salesman, on the road. At the time, Maurice Rubinoff began teaching as a Hebrew teacher in Berlin, New Hampshire, commuting. Now the Portland Confectionary and Specialty Company is his business. He is still a Hebrew teacher at the Portland Hebrew School and manages to combine his business with teaching two days a week and on Saturday.

The Rubinoffs have three children. Stephen graduated from the University of Maine at Orono, and is the Director of Public Relations for the LEAA in

Augusta. Daniel and Cynthia are students at the University of Maine in Orono. After the Yom Kippur War, Daniel left school, worked and earned the money to go to Israel where he spent five months working in a kibbutz. The three children then turned around and earned the money to send the Rubinoffs to Israel in 1977.

Mr. Rubinoff is equally comfortable with the Orthodox and Conservative groups and identifies personally with Zionism. He has served as treasurer of Etz Chaim, a member of Vaad Hoir, and is treasurer of Shaarey Tphiloh on Noyes Street. He was one of the original members during the building days. He helped plan the Portland Hebrew School and served as its Administrator. Concerned with Jewish education, he has held the position of vice-president of education at Shaarey Tphiloh and he has been in charge of the youth committee for Jewish education.

The Rubinoffs reside at 53 Codman Street.

August, 1977

JEWISH BICENTENNIAL PROJECT

Portland, Maine

1976

ORIGINAL TRANSCRIPT

Interviewee Name Maurice Kubacki

I certify that I have transcribed the Interview Tapes to the best of my ability, as accurately and clearly as possible. I have discussed the contents of the tapes and transcripts with no one.

Transcriber:

Name Judith Goldberg

Signature Judith Goldberg

Date January 24 1977

Ok'd by: K. Feig

Project Director

Jewish Bicentennial Project
Dr. Konnilyn Feig, Director
1976

JEWISH BICENTENNIAL PROJECT

Portland, Maine

1976

EDITED TRANSCRIPT

Interviewee Name Maurice Rubinoff

I certify that I have edited the Original Transcript to the best of my ability, checking carefully on all unclear sounds and omissions from the tape. I have added no material of substance and changed no ideas. The editing goals were completion, clarity, removal of redundancy, removal of unnecessary comments and "chatter" non central to the interview, and grammatical clarification. The prime goal was a transcript which read well, flowed, and presented the ideas clearly, while always retaining the mechanisms and responses which kept intact the personality, state of mind, and beliefs of the interviewee.

Editor:

Name and Title Dr. Konnilyn Feig

Signature Konnilyn Feig

Date 2/1/77

Reread and Rechecked and held Confidential by

Name Lisa Wilhelm (signature)

Date 2/6/77

Name _____ (signature)

Date _____

Typist:

I certify that I have typed this transcript accurately and held the contents confidential.

Name Judith Goldberg (signature)

Date 3-23-77

Jewish Bicentennial Project
Dr. Konnilyn Feig, Director
1976

JEIISH BICENTENNIAL ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEWEE: Mr. Maurice Rubinoff

INTERVIEWER: Dr. Konnilyn Feig

DATE: October 18, 1976

F: This is an interview with Mr. Maurice Rubinoff for the Jewish Federation and University of Maine College of Arts and Sciences, the Jewish Bicentennial Oral History Project by Dr. Konnilyn Feig and her assistants Lisa Wilhelm, and Martha Browne, with the consultant Cynthia Mack, Mrs. Charles Mack, present at 53 Codman Street, Portland, Maine, on October 18, 1976 at 7:15 p.m. Mrs. Rubinoff [Leah] is also present.

F: First of all, Mr. Rubinoff is too young to interview because he is only 58 years old and this study is supposed to be confined to those 65 and older. We've made exceptions,but. . . !

R: I feel 65, don't kid yourself.

F: Five instances - one of them was Cynthia Mack and one of them is yourself because of information you can give us. Now, I know you were born in Portland. What about your parents?

F: Lithuania, both of them.

F: Did they come over together?

F: They came over separately. They met in this country. They met in Portland, Maine, as a matter of fact.

F: Okay! Let's start with your father then. Do you know where in Lithuania he was born?

R: No, I really don't.

F: When he talked about it, was it a small town?

R: I lost my father when he was 36 years old, and I was at that time about 12 years old. Of course, we didn't have too many conversations or discussions together. The man was involved in business and at that time he got up at 6 a.m. to go to work and came home at 7 p.m. Unfortunately, it was a different generation. In that generation there was not as much conversation between parents and children. And, of course, he was involved in business so I didn't have too much of an opportunity to discuss his background and to find out from him and share with him in his experiences. Also, I think I was a little bit too young at that time to appreciate it as I might have today.

F: Do you have any idea in what year he came over?

R: Yuh, my father was about 19 years old. He came to Pennsylvania originally.

F: Do you know what year?

F: I would say he was born in 1895. He probably came in the early 1900's. Probably at about 17 or 18 he came to Pennsylvania with part of a large family. His father had seven or eight brothers who are all over the globe. Five or six of them are in Israel today. We have many relatives in Israel. The family originally lived in Pennsylvania. Subsequently, his father decided to come to Portland, Maine where he had landzleit. So they came here and his father established himself in a very small grocery store in the Middle Street area where most of us lived at that time. My father went into one business which was not a success, went into another business, which was photography about which he knew nothing and had the same lack of success. Subsequently, he went into the grocery business where he hit it. As a matter of fact he was in the grocery business probably for about ten years. He had the first IGA store in Portland. Then, he had a tumor on the brain and when he died at the age of 36, he was an established businessman and provided for his family considerably in the way of insurance and in the way of educational benefits for four children. What I knew of my father was in terms of his compassion and consideration for the family and his solicitude, not only for his wife. He brought his wife's whole family from the Old Country, which at that time was a considerable expense and more to his credit since he himself was

not directly involved. His family was all here, but he did bring over my mother's whole family. As a matter of fact, at that time the only way he could bring over my grandfather, who was an ordained Rabbi, was by creating the fiction of a post as a Rabbi in Portland. He couldn't bring him over at that time unless there was a position provided for him so that he wouldn't be a burden on the State. So Etz Chaim Shul attested in writing that he would, in fact, be their Rabbi when he came over. He did come over and he stayed in Portland for a couple of years on Middle Street. Then he was able to find himself a position as a Rabbi in Boston. My mother had another star boarder in the house, a very successful businessman in Portland, A.I. Passman. A.I. Passman was a greenhorn from Russia. He came over at that time and lived with us. He was my mother's star boarder. A.I. had a beautiful gold watch and one day he was fast asleep in a rocking chair. I was about seven years old. I was attracted by the gold watch like Moses was with the gold. So I took the watch and made short work of it. Well, this must have been 45 years ago, and Abe Passman sends me a bill every Yom Kippur for the watch [All: Laugh]. I think back about it with a great deal of warmth. At any rate, after my grandfather came over and my father was able to bring across my grandmother, his wife, and two of the children, they subsequently settled in Boston. It had its humorous aspects because I had an uncle who was a year and a half older than I was. That was a little bit unusual. They established themselves in Boston and were identified with the Crawford Street Synagogue in the Roxbury area at that time.

F: Was your grandfather on your father's side Orthodox?

R: My grandfather on my father's side was extremely Orthodox, a very pious man. You may have established already from previous interviews that Portland was considered a small Jerusalem, for its extreme piety. And as I look back on those days, I remember that it was an extremely pious community. If anybody had the chutzpah to ride on the Shabbat, they were very, very sure not to ride by the Synagogue. They went on all the back streets to avoid the Synagogue, because this was not the thing to do. Everybody was quite pious. The younger generation may not have felt particularly Orthodox, but that was a generation where they had a great deal of consideration for the religion of their parents. Whether they believed in it or felt deeply about it or not was unimportant to them. They gave them that respect and that consideration, so in those days nobody rode on Shabbos. Very, very very few people worked on Shabbos. And these were the days when Mark Sulkowitch established the precept of being closed on Shabbos and open on Sunday. He was a very pious man. Most of them were

well-educated. Of course, the only education they had in the Old Country was not a secular education. They were not permitted in the schools, as you know. So the only education they had in the Old Country was within the walls of the shtetl. They had a Hebrew and a religious education, not so much Hebrew as it was religious. I could mention the names of many families. They were all the same kind of people. My grandfather was particularly good. He had a skill of being able to read the Torah. So in the Etz Chaim Shul, he used to read the Torah on Shabbat and on Friday night. Right after the Shabbos meal, he would sit down for two or three hours to go over it, even though he had been over it every year time and time again. He was the kind of man who maintained the fiction of not carrying a handkerchief on Shabbat. They used to put two handkerchiefs together to form a belt creating the fiction of not carrying on the Shabbat. And, of course, the rest of the family was the very same way.

F: Now just a minute, let's get your mother. [R: All right] Her parents are living in Lithuania.

R: Her parents are living in Lithuania and she came alone as a girl of 18 years.

F: What year, do you know?

R: About the same time, 1917 or 1918.

F: By the way, why did your grandfather say he came to America? Your grandfather on your father's side? It is not obvious. There are many reasons.

R: There were many fictions. I don't know that. I don't know why he came, but as you know, there were many fictions.

F: Now your mother grows up where in Lithuania?

R: She grows up in the Kovna area.

F: Is it in a small town?

R: Well, Kovna was a large town. She lived in a small town.

F: A shtetl?

R: It was a little bit larger than a shtetl. A shtetl was way down on the totem pole. This was a little larger than a shtetl. There were many boys who were ordained, but they weren't all in the Rabbinate so to speak. So my grandfather over there was a forester. He would estimate the amount of cords of wood that the guy had on

his estate, which was quite a skill. And he made a pretty good living over there. It wasn't a Jewish living, and so he came over here. Oh, I'm a little ahead of myself.

F: Your mother then came here.

R: My mother came over here as a young lady, a beautiful girl of 18 years. She came originally to Boston, Massachusetts, where we had many relatives.

F: Why did she come?

R: Why did she come? For opportunity and because my grandfather felt that as a beautiful young lady she would have some opportunity in this country that she wouldn't have over there, educationally and in terms of marriage. And we had a great many relatives over here at that time who had nice positions. So they sent her over here.

F: Were there any brothers or sisters left at home?

R: Yes. She had two sisters and three brothers at home. Two sisters, three brothers and her two parents.

F: Was she the oldest?

R: She was next to the oldest.

F: She came over on her own.

R: Yuh. The oldest brother was a mathematician who died maybe a short time ago, we'll get to him. He was in Portland and was with me at the Temple.

F: Now your mother when she came over here spoke Yiddish and Lithuanian?

R: She spoke Yiddish and Lithuanian, right.

F: Not Russian, but Lithuanian.

R: Russian, too. Of course, everybody over there spoke Russian. Lithuanian is a Slavic tongue.

F: So she ended up in Boston.

R: Ended up in Boston, right.

F: How did she get to Portland?

R: She got to Portland because we are part of a large family and you've run across the name - Shohet.

F: How do you spell it?

R: Shohet. He and his father were the Rabbis here in Portland and that is our family.

F: Okay. Well, all right, all right, all right! Is that your mother's . . .

R: They were my mother's first cousins.

F: Okay. Let's hold on here just a minute, please.

R: Okay.

F: I just want to get some relationships straight, if you don't mind.

R: Yuh.

F: This is not hard on us, in case you don't realize it, because we are used to people telling us that they are related to all the people of the whole world.

R: Well, lanzleit also considered themselves related, but this is a blood relationship.

F: I am not stunned by it. It could be a lot more complicated.

R: Well, I didn't to it to stun you!

F: All right now, there was a Rabbi here in town, [R: Yuh, right] the Rabbi of the Newbury Street Synagogue.

R: Well, the Newbury Shul, right.

F: The Newbury Street Shul. A Rabbi named Shohet.

CM: What was his first name, Maurice?

R: Moshe.

F: Moshe Shohet.

R: Yuh, yuh. His father was a Rabbi before him here, too. His father's name was Chaim.

F: There were three of them?

R: There were two of them.

F: I want the father first.

R: The father was Chaim.

F: The father was . . .

R: Etz Chaim.

F: Yuh, Etz Chaim. Yuh, but it still is not making any sense. Now let me go through this. There is a Rabbi who is in the Newbury Street Shul [R: Right] when it was built between about 1913 and 1920 and his name was Shohet.

R: That was Chaim.

F: That is Chaim Shohet.

R: Right.

F: And he was known as a very, very learned man. Correct?

R: Yes.

F: Very, very learned. Now what relationship was that man to your mother?

R: Well, he was her first cousin and Moshe, his son, was the second cousin.

F: And they were here before . . .

R: All right. Lewiston has a large family of Singers. That is the same family. And the Farbers, Dave Farber, is also related to the Shohets.

F: All right, just a minute. Now let me get all my things out here [R: Okay, fine]. Okay, so Chaim Shohet until 1921 was the Rabbi of . . .

R: Shaarey Tphiloh.

F: Shaarey Tphiloh, and he was known to be or called by many people a distinguished scholar [R: Right]. And some of the things he did included setting up the Talmudic study groups. He was interested in that kind of thing as a Rabbi.

R: Yuh, I knew very little about him. After him, his son inherited . . .

F: Now just a minute [R: Yuh]. Here is where the problem comes, because the stories are all mixed up. Something happened in Shaarey Tphiloh [R: Right], but something also happened with the son living in Lewiston who came down. This is Moshe? [R: Yuh, right] He comes down here, [R: Yuh] and either Chaim is thinking about retiring and wants a replacement, or the congregation wants a replacement [R: Yuh, right]. Is that so far true?

R: As far as I know the story, yes.

F: But he thinks it would be great, or the congregation thinks it would be great if Moshe Shohet, his son, who is a Rabbi in Lewiston, came down. [F: Yuh] He comes down to be either interviewed or to participate in a service or whatever and some of the people at the Shaarey Tphiloh don't like him. Is that correct?

R: That is led by the Sacknoff group as I understand the story, right.

F: And so they decide the heck with it . . .

R: They took away his chair, that is the way . . .

F: They took away Moshe's chair.

R: They took away Moshe or Chaim's chair.

F: Yuh, which is it?

R: I think it must have been Chaim's chair because they built the Shul and called it Etz Chaim.

F: And so the people in Shaarey Tphiloh who did not treat Chaim and his son right, stayed in Shaarey Tphiloh. But the others said we don't like this, so they went and moved and formed Etz Chaim [R: Right] and they took Rabbi Chaim Shohet with them and Moshe went back to Lewiston, correct?

R: Could be. I don't know. I can't tell you that part of it. The details I don't know.

F: Well, nobody does.

R: Yuh, well I don't know these details at all. These are all strange to me.

F: Now I want to suggest something to you that others have not suggested [R: Yuh]. Now, I want to get back to what the controversy was about,

because there are all sorts of myths about it [R: Yuh]. What have you heard was the reason that they didn't like Moshe?

R: I don't know what their reasons were. I knew Moshe. I spent many hours in his home through the family. I know where the house is. I remember going into the house, right up on the corner here.

F: Up in Lewiston or here?

R: No, here in Portland. I also know that . . .

F: Moshe lived in this town?

R: Oh, yes. He lived on the corner of Newbury Street and that little street that goes down. You know, it's one block over from Franklin. The house is standing there today. He lived there for many years.

F: Now this is not Chaim. This is Moshe.

R: I didn't know Chaim.

F: Well, where was Moshe the Rabbi?

R: Moshe was the Rabbi here.

F: At Etz Chaim?

R: He was the Rabbi at Etz Chaim, right.

F: And not paid very much, right?

R: Nobody was paid very much in those days. Twelve dollars a week was a lot.

F: But they still had a Rabbi at Shaarey Tphiloh?

R: Yes, they did. They had several there. Essrig was among those whom I know, but Moshe was the Rabbi at Etz Chaim.

F: Now, what happened to Chaim?

R: Chaim passed away,I guess, in this country.

F: They kept him on for a couple of years?

R: I don't know how long. I don't know what the continuity was at this time.

F: Was Moshe a hunchback?

R: No, bent over. He had a son who was a hunchback. Moshe may have been a hunchback. I know that he walked with a stoop. I wouldn't have classified him as a hunchback because to me it wasn't that pronounced.

CM: I had asked about that. It was a disease. It was not hunchback at all.

R: I remember Moshe as though it were yesterday. Yuh, I don't believe that. I've never heard anybody refer to him as a hunchback. Now here is the way the story might have been. He had the sons who were ne're-do-wells and this didn't sit too well with the community. One of them I think might have taken out Shiksas or one of these things.

F: What is the name of the disease?

CM: Marie Strumple's disease.

F: What in the world is that?

CM: Well, it is a stiffening of the back.

F: Somebody suggested that, uh . . .

R: That Moshe died from that?

F: No, no, no. That the reason that all of this mess started was because some people in that congregation didn't want a hunchback Rabbi!

R: I have no comment on that.

F: We are never going to know the truth of this story.

R: Well, the only ones you would get it from were more of the contemporaries and I was far from it. The only way I know it is that I have always considered myself a part of two generations.

F: But don't you understand that nobody would tell us that if it were true?

R: What is that?

F: Nobody would tell us that if it were the truth.

R: I don't know. It depends who you were working with. But, as I say, I spoke Yiddish well. I knew many of the old-timers on

a personal level and so I know of the period. But, in terms of the local politics, I am not conversant.

F: But the Shohets are relatives of yours?

R: Yes.

F: Okay, let's go back to your mother now. She had a lot of relatives in Boston and she came to Portland because . . .

R: She lived with the Shohets there. There was a Rabbi. He was a Shohet. Moshe's brother was a Rabbi in Yonkers. Another one was an M.D. in Boston who used to come to the other grandfather's house all the time. And another was a Shohet in Boston. She was with the Shohet family, so they knew of a shiddach - a possible shiddach for her - a nice, Jewish boy in Portland, Maine. They knew about it through Moshe who was also interested in my mother, Rivkah, because it was a part of the family. So they brought her down for a visit. You know how these visits evolve into a stay. So she met my father who was a very handsome man and responsible, quiet, unlike his son! At any rate, it was a match. It was one of these things that even though it had been arranged, it took immediately. She liked him. He didn't know about her temper at the time, so it worked out very well! So she stayed here for quite a while. She lived here for about a year because nobody rushes these things and I don't think my father had a job at the time. So this is the way the whole thing happened.

F: Do you remember what year they were married?

R: No, I don't.

F: Sometime in the Twenties?

R: Obviously.

F: Now, your father went into the grocery business and then the photography business.

R: He went into the photography business with a man by the name of Goren and they lost their shirts. And, besides that, who ever heard of a Jewish photographer?

CM: Right! [All: Laugh]

F: So your father died in 1931, right?

R: Right.

F: When did your mother die?

R: My mother died 16 years ago.

PA: 1960, then.

R: Yuh. She brought up four children.

F: Now your grandparents. Did they outlive your father?

R: My father's father died one year before him, almost to the day.

F: And it was in the Twenties that your father and your mother were bringing over your mother's family.

R: Right.

F: And he brought them over, plus another Rabbi Shohet.

R: No, he brought Rabbi Halpern. Her maiden name was Halpern.

F: Okay. She had been in a family of Rabbis.

R: Right, they were in Boston. She brought over her mother and they brought over a sister and a brother.

F: And in the Old Country left how many?

R: Well, one of the brothers went to Mexico. I think he was following Trotsky! A very interesting development in those days. It was after the time of the awakening. Many of these people decided that Judaism as they knew it was not for them. They wanted to get out into the world and they wanted that comradeship. The only way they could get it was by joining the newly arrived, the Communists. Most of them joined the Communist Party. As a matter of fact, all of my grandfather's children were ultimately Communists.

F: Finally, we have found some.

R: Oh, yuh.

F: And that is your mother's father?

R: I was in Boston during the Writers Projects and that was in the early Thirties. At that time I was going to school and that was THE thing. Because all the boys who went over to the Abraham Lincoln brigade were all fellow travelers at that time, so-called. But the reason why they went into the Party was because it was the

only hope they had of getting away from the shtetl, getting acceptance, and a part of the New World - the Brave New World.

F: All right. Now, your mother is over here and your father is over here and they are married [R: Yuh] and your mother lives until 1960, right? Now, correct me if I am wrong, obviously she came from a very Orthodox home.

R: Oh, yes, right, right.

F: And did she drop some things right away in coming to America do you think?

R: No, they were all traditionalists. As a matter of fact, nobody dropped anything. Of course, they all wore their own hair, for example . . .

F: Did your mother wear a wig?

R: The little things they dropped, of course they did.

F: Oh, the little things they dropped?

R: Yuh, of course they did.

F: Your mother didn't wear a wig.

R: When it came to the home and kashruth and the rest of it, this they kept because they didn't know anything else and they were too steeped in the old forms and they were afraid to drop any of those. So they maintained everything other than those little things. I am sure that my mother didn't go to the mikvah the way her mother did and the way her mother-in-law did.

F: It is in the Twenties, now, and your father finally gets a good business and along come the kids. Now, how many were there?

R: Four of us.

F: All right, would you do it for me, old to young?

R: Sure, I am the oldest. I have a sister Dorothy now living in Haverhill, Massachusetts who is a year my junior.

F: And she is married?

R: Married to a dermatologist there.

F: Did she go to college?

R: She went to the University. She is a dietician. She went to the University of Maine. She was a dietician in the Massachusetts General and met a boy in Haverhill, and they were married.

F: And he is Jewish?

R: Yes. The next one is Sylvia. Sylvia went to school in Boston, to business school. She met a nice Jewish boy and they are married. They are living in South Brookline.

F: And what does he do?

R: He is one of the junior executives of one of the big philanthropists in Boston, a fellow by the name of Stone, who likes nice Jewish boys whose wives have traditional homes.

F: And the fourth one?

R: And the fourth one is the smartest of all of them. She is also a dietician and she works for HIP in New York today. She went to the University of Massachusetts. I think she went to Jackson, too. She was a dietician in Boston and married a Jewish boy who is in advertising and they live now in the Scarsdale, Westchester area.

F: Do all three of them, not counting you, keep a kosher home?

R: Just one does.

F: Do you?

R: No.

F: One person in that family [R: Right] of that generation keeps a kosher home [R: Right]. The other three, would you find them in a Temple or Synagogue more than on the High Holidays?

R: Oh, yes. As a matter of fact, Dorothy's husband is a former president of the Temple in Haverhill and is consulted on all important considerations.

F: So we begin with a family of immigrants - a mother and father - and in your home what language was spoken?

R: Jewish.

F: Could your father speak English, though?

R: Yes.

F: Did your mother ever learn it?

R: Yes. Learned it and spoke it.

F: Could she read it?

R: Oh, yes.

F: When you were growing up, were there Yiddish newspapers in the home?

R: Yes.

F: What about the Forward?

R: The Forward was read only by the Labor Zionists. All right, the Forward was a socialist newspaper. The Labor Zionists read the Forward. As a matter of fact, the Conservative average Jewish family didn't read the Forward. As a matter of fact, it was almost a stigma. If you read the Forward, you were automatically stigmatized.

F: Well, you see, I have not found any Labor Zionists in the city of Portland. Nobody will admit that anybody in their family ever was a Labor Zionist. But I have a number of people who, when I asked them which newspaper, say the Forward, and I found that very interesting.

R: The Conservative Jewish families all read either the Morgen Journal or the Tag.

F: All right. So you have this immigrant family, both the mother and the father growing up in the Old Country, speaking Yiddish in the home, keeping a formal Orthodox home, correct?

R: Yes. Casual formal.

F: If a dish got mixed up, there weren't any heart attacks?

R: Not really, because there was nobody to sit in judgment. My father and mother probably felt pretty much the same. I think, given an opportunity, they would have cast off, except of course that my father had his mother sitting next door and my mother was the daughter of a Rabbi. So it was one of these deals.

F: Right. All right. Now both of them come from strongly religious homes, particularly your mother who has all these Rabbis in her background.

R: Right, right. The end of the line.

F: Did all four kids go to Hebrew School?

R: Yes, yes.

F: Let's see, in what year were you born?

R: I was born around 1917.

F: 1917?

R: Right. I was 59 my last birthday.

F: So your parents were married in about 1915, then.

R: Well, those are mathematics. You can figure that out. I was born a year or two after they were married.

F: All right. So everybody went to Hebrew School. To which Hebrew School did you go?

R: Portland Hebrew School.

F: Was that on Pearl Street?

R: This was before Pearl Street. We went originally to a Hebrew school that was ongoing in the Etz Chaim Shul. There was a Hebrew school on Congress Street at that time because we were members of the Congress Street Shul. And we had a man who must have been very progressive for his day, a man by the name of Hankin. He must have been progressive because he used to take us out for canoe rides in the Stroudwater River before it was polluted! A beautiful experience, really.

F: Now your parents when they first came here obviously went to the Newbury Street Shul, and then they broke off and went to Etz Chaim [R: Right]. You grew up . . .

R: I grew up on Newbury Street. We lived on Newbury Street.

F: But where was your Bar Mitzvah?

R: Okay, now I am going to shock you. When I tell my kids I never had a Bar Mitzvah, they equate that with like a circumcision. I never did have a Bar Mitzvah. Not because of the strong rebellion, but because I was 12 years old when my father died, and my mother took over the business. She was going to the business every day. I was going to Shul, going to Etz Chaim every morning and saying

Kaddish. And the Bar Mitzvah period just passed by, and I wasn't prepared for a Bar Mitzvah. I never did have a Bar Mitzvah.

F: But you went to Hebrew School.

R: I went to Hebrew School.

F: And you learned something there?

R: Not too much.

F: Really?

R: Not too much because I was the hellion. I was the one who used to throw the stink bombs in through the window in those days.

F: Why?

R: Well, because I was an undisciplined individual. I took a long time to grow up and at that time I was one of the wilder ones, that's all. I had that kind of a metabolism and that kind of a nature.

F: Was it hard to sit still that many hours a day?

R: Oh, yuh, and of course, I was hot-headed and the type that we had as teachers there, I found it easier to disagree with them than to sit still and to be a good boy. I don't know how much I learned at that time.

F: So the only son of the Rubinoff family was not Bar Mitzvahed.

R: Right, right. Of course, I object with the emphasis you place on that.

F: It's not me. I don't make up the rules.

R: Because it's custom. It's not even a tradition, and as a matter of fact, Bar Mitzvah plays no part in our tradition, really. It's comparatively new and people equate it with Judaism. But it is really no part of Judaism. Bar Mitzvah is a state that you arrive at automatically. It's not the ceremony that creates that. Now I thought maybe I would just leave this with you. I am not preaching. I just want to point that out. When I do point it out to the kids, they think it is a horrible situation maybe because I didn't get any fountain pens as gifts. I feel very badly myself, but really, the Bar Mitzvah in itself in their minds may not have

loomed as large as it would today. God forbid a child should not be Bar Mitzvahed. Look, the only reason they go to Hebrew School is so they can arrive at that state, but in the old days it wasn't that important.

F: Very interesting.

R: Well, it is interesting. That's why I thought I would pass it on!

F: So, your father died in the beginning or the middle of the Depression and he left you some things so that you weren't on starvation row.

R: He left a good business. He left enough merchandise to stock that business for two years. He had a lot of stock, so my mother was able to keep the business going. Of course, she was a poor businesswoman. She brought in a manager and he robbed her.

F: By the way, since school is going on and both of your kids are at Orono, what are they doing home in the middle of the week? Are they cutting classes?

R: No, no. As a matter of fact, Danny has got a class tonight. He's got a Red Cross class. Cindy is staying out this year. As a matter of fact, Cindy went to Orono last year, and she was a terrific student. She was an assistant in one of the fraternities. She was an Eagle. She decided she wanted to come home.

F: I thought maybe both of them were the stink-bomb-types-through-windows.

R: No, no, no. I wouldn't let my children do that. It was okay for me, but you know, different standards!

F: What did your family live on from 1931?

R: Well, my mother had the business for a long time.

F: She kept it?

R: She kept the business.

F: She got better at it?

R: Well, she sort of survived. See, it was a good business, and we were out in East Deering.

F: Did the kids help?

R: I did. I was the only one old enough actually to help. She ran the business for about ten years and then she finally sold it, and subsequently moved to Boston. She had three daughters and wanted to give them an opportunity. She figured that in Portland, God forbid, there was very little opportunity for three girls. So I went away to school and she took the three girls and went to Boston which, as it turned out, did very well.

F: Did she move back then?

R: Oh, no. She stayed in Boston.

F: You are the only one who stayed.

R: Right.

F: In Portland.

R: Right, right.

F: You didn't have any handmade business ready for you when you got out of school or anything.

R: Oh, no, no.

F: So what you did was you, correct?

R: Yuh, correct.

F: You've got your two immigrant parents, but then all the kids went to college.

R: Right.

F: We've got all of them going to college and some of them going off for advanced degrees. [R: Right] You went to the University of Maine.

R: And Boston University.

F: Did you get a degree?

R: Yes.

F: What kind of degree?

R: B.S. - Bachelor of Science.

F: In what?

R: Business administration. From B.U.

F: Now, what year did you graduate from college?

R: Well, I got my degree after I got out of the service. What I was doing was going to school in Boston and also working. I worked in the first Star Market there and I was going to school and catching my courses whenever I could. So I was getting all kinds of credits. Then I went into the service. When I got out of the service, I went back and finished up and got my degree.

F: What year did you go into the service?

R: I went into the service in 1943.

F: And up until then, you were going to school in Orono.

R: No, I was in Boston. I was living in Boston and working in Boston. I had an apartment on Beacon Street with some other boys.

F: I want to go back now. What year did you leave Portland, then?

R: Well, I left Portland in about 1938.

F: As a young man.

R: Yuh, right.

F: What high school was it, by the way?

R: Portland High School.

F: What kind of discrimination, what kind of Antisemitism did you face?

R: Spasmodic. Nothing really overt because I went to Butler School, my grammar school, and met some lovely friends there. Of course, Butler grammar school was a peg above most of them socially, and there were nicer-type individuals. But I also went to the North School and that was the roughest school in town and still is. And there it was quite overt. We lived on Munjoy Hill for many years, and I palled around with a lot of the Jewish boys. We had an aggregation called the "Hebrew Aces" and in the different seasons we had a baseball team, a football team, a basketball team. Now when we

would meet with other teams in the community, it was fine as long as we lost. God forbid we won. Then we had to fight our way out! [F: Laughs] When we used to play at the Chestnut Street gym and they had a little gallery, we used to get it if we were ahead. It was quite overt. I lived on Cumberland Avenue across the street from the Cathedral, and some of the Catholic boys at that time were pretty rough. And it is very interesting because some of the boys I meet today, my contemporaries, are just as nice as could be and we have a lot of conversation. We never talk about those days when they used to curse me up and down. But it's a nice relationship now. In those days, they were products of their own familial background and what they were doing was reflecting what they heard at home. We were the Christ killers and this is the way they felt about it. It many cases, it was quite overt. The kids I was growing up with at that time all went through the same type of experience, and it is quite a contrast from today. I can speak of today because with Steve and Danny, particularly, their frame of reference I would say in 80 percent non-Jewish. Danny's best friends are non-Jewish. Steve has a lot of good Jewish friends, but most of his best friends are non-Jewish. It is completely different and I worry sometimes because he doesn't know the other side of the picture. I don't feel that I should go to any extremes to tell him about it, but it bothers me that he doesn't know it, because I figure God forbid any kind of catastrophe. I was in the German situation, and know first-hand what happened there. Sometimes I feel that it may well be a fool's paradise. It was the other end of the pendulum when we were growing up. It was pretty tough. It wasn't as bad as the Jews experienced in Russia, but it was next door to it. We had our own cross to bear, if you will pardon the expression, and this was the kind of life that we lived at that time. It was an unpleasant life. We had very few gentile friends. Quite different than the situation today.

F: When you were growing up in high school, after your father died, were you a regular member at Shul?

R: I went all the time for years. As a matter of fact, that is where I got a great deal of my background in terms of tphilla, in terms of prayer, in terms of the liturgy. I went every morning.

F: You did?

R: Oh, yes. This was the thing in those days, except for a few mornings. I was getting up one morning to get dressed about six in the morning and I had been smoking surreptitiously in the barn behind the house on Vesper Street near you. And I passed out [Laughs] and I don't know what happened. But my

mother got home at noon and,of course, took me to the doctor and they had it all cooked up. The doctor says, "Maurice, you are a very lucky boy." He says, "You know what happened? You have a smoke clot around your heart." [All: Laugh] And he says, "You better be mighty careful about what you do in the future." He didn't say to substitute women for tobacco or anything, but he says, "I'd be very careful about smoking," and it scared me for at least two weeks. He gave me the deal about the smoke clot. But in terms of going to Shul, I went to Etz Chaim every morning. There was also another anecdote. Where the old reservoir was on the hill, we used to play with the boys. And, of course, they used to daven around five. In those days, they were all old-timers, and so instead of going to Etz Chaim for services, I would run across the street to the Shul. As you know, any layman can lead the service. And since I had the expertise, they used to permit me to lead the service, to do the praying at the bimah and, of course, there were certain rules attached. You were supposed to have a jacket on. You were supposed to have a tie on. You were supposed to be presentable. So I used to rush in there, the sweat was pouring down me, and I'd get up there at the bimah and the old man Gayitsky used to wail and say, "You let the Shaygetz up there," Shaygetz is an apostate. "He hasn't got a tie on. Where is his jacket? The sweat is pouring down him. What kind of respect is that?" But in those days we did it. The only way we did it was the way that we knew it, and we used to go three times a day. Well, we used to go twice a day, but the morning service and afternoon and evening services were tied together so it was one service.

F: Until you left Portland you went?

R: Well, no. The memorial services are for 11 months.

F: I know that.

R: Yuh.

F: But after you stopped that . . .

R: Well, after I stopped that, I didn't go every day, of course not. But everybody used to go on Shabbat. All my contemporaries used to go every Shabbos. Of course, after Shul we used to go up to the Emerson yard and play ball, but we'd get to Shul anyway.

F: And you were living in a kosher home.

R: Yuh.

F: Did you break that outside the home?

R: There wasn't too much opportunity to break it. I guess maybe once in awhile, we'd have an Italian sandwich. I suppose this went on everywhere. But all the boys did that with very few exceptions. I did have a couple of friends for whom I used to be the Shabbos goy. When we went to the movies together on Shabbos, I used to buy the tickets. The only way he would go was if I would buy the tickets. It didn't bother his father, a wonderful person, one of the partners in Sulkowitchs. It didn't bother his father as long as it wasn't his son who was buying the tickets. If Moishe Rubinoff bought the tickets, that was okay. We used to be wonderful friends because many years after that when I used to go down to Sulkowitchs, the father and I used to have nice conversations talking about the old days. But, of course, we went away from it.

F: Did the Depression hit your family hard?

R: Look, we all retrenched.

F: Sure.

R: There was no question about it.

F: You didn't go hungry?

R: We never went hungry. As a matter of fact, when I look back on those days in Portland, I don't think there was anybody among my contemporaries who did go hungry. We cut back on many things, but everybody worked and everybody made a living. Of course, in my grandparents' home they were used to leading an austere life. My grandfather had a little store, the kind of store where you wrapped the herring in newspapers. And I think the newsprint added a certain flavor to the herring. I never did find out why they used newspaper [All: Laugh]. But in those days, in the bathroom, there was never any paper. Thank God for Sunkist. If it weren't for Sunkist [Laughs] it would have been a tough situation. Look, let's face it, you didn't have to worry about kashruth or worry about keeping Pesach because the only thing you had was matzoh with some chicken fat and a glass of tea. This was that kind of home and everybody was used to that kind of living so it was no big deal. Going hungry - nobody went hungry. You may have eaten a lot of starches, but nobody went hungry.

F: Now, besides the Shul, did you belong to any other Jewish groups when you were growing up? When you were in high school?

R: Well, in high school, we had a few Jewish groups.

F: Was there a Jewish fraternity?

R: Yes, Mu Sigma. We had several, we had Mu Sigma, Phi Delta Mu and Delta Psi - three Jewish fraternities. You know, its hard for an old guy to remember. They say the older you get the better you remember the old days!

F: Well, what did these fraternities do?

R: Social. In those days it was 100 percent social.

F: Are they still around?

R: Yes, yes. Mu Sigma is around. That is the only one that is around. Mu Sigma was a National fraternity and I think the reason they are still around is that one of the members owns The 21 Club.

F: The 21 Club?

R: In New York.

F: Oh.

R: Right, Jack Krandler, the two Krandler brothers, right. They were both in Mu Sigma. So when we used to have our conventions that is where they all wound up - at The 21 Club. So at an early age we learned about The 21 Club. Now, there are also sororities. There were three. There was Iota Phi, Theta Omicron and Delta Kappa. There were three Jewish sororities. It was a lovely experience as I think back.

F: Where did you meet, at the Wilmot Jewish Community Center?

R: No, no. We met in the homes. This was after the Community Center on Wilmot Street, and I even have nice memories about Wilmot Street.

F: Do you remember Wilmot Street?

R: Yes, I do. Very well.

F: Do you remember going there for anything?

R: Oh, yes.

F: Like for what?

R: As a matter of fact, I remember the downstairs and the stairs going upstairs. We used to have scout meetings there. I remember the half-ass library they had there, which to us was pretty good in those days. At any rate, we went to the Community Center. After that, of course, as a fraternity member, we used to meet on Sunday nights. And we all used to get out about 9:30 and we would all rush like hell for the girls' meetings. The different boys would go to the different meetings, depending on where their interests lay!

F: I was going to ask you. I can't ask anyone this. You can appreciate that with some of the people who I am interviewing I can't look a man straight in the face and say, "What did you do for fun?" They might just pass out! Now in high school, what did you do for fun? I assume that the people had some fun.

R: Oh, we had a lot of fun. As a matter of fact, we had groups of boys and girls who were a very closely knit group and we used to meet at each others' homes. We used to go dancing. Dancing was very, very much in vogue. We used to go to the dances at the Pier in those days. Those were a lot of fun. In those days everybody used to date and date steadily. For example, I started to date Leah when I was about 11 years old. Her mother tried to break it up about 16 times, but it never took. We used to meet in each others' homes. We used to go to fraternity meetings, sorority meetings. We used to go to the high school functions. There was a lot going on. We used to get together surreptitiously sometimes in the afternoons and have a little fun and this kind of thing.

F: Dancing was really in, though.

R: Dancing was the big thing, right.

F: Did you like to dance?

R: No, I didn't. I only danced because I had to dance. I hated it [All: Laughs], but Leah was a terrific dancer.

F: Now, you married your wife in 1943, just before you went in the service?

R: Oh, I would say I married her maybe about a month before I went into the service.

F: Why did you marry her then?

R: Well, we had broken up. I went away to school and Leah went to school. Leah went to Smith and then she went to St. Louis University to get her Masters and for a period of two years I didn't see her. We didn't correspond, and it was all off. I was working at that time in Connecticut. I was working for the Government as an inspector of Army ordnance. My mother was living in Brookline at that time. I don't know what happened. I came to Boston and Leah was working as a social worker. I think her first position was in Jewish Family Services in Boston. I met her, somehow, someplace, and I went back to Connecticut and called her. And when I'd come into Boston, I would date her, catch as catch can, I had to take my chances with the rest of them. It blossomed and we were married just before I went into the service. Of course, we were married because I went into the service. Otherwise we might have waited a couple of more years. I went into the service in December of that year and we were married just before that.

F: Your wife was born in Portland?

R: She was born in Portland.

F: Were her parents born in America?

R: Her mother was born in Russia. Her father was born in New York City.

F: What was her maiden name?

R: Her maiden name was Merchant, and he was a Sapiro. He comes from a large family in Worcester, Massachusetts.

F: Who do I know who are some Merchants?

R: And her mother was a very unusual woman. Mother never had any formal education, but was an unusually intelligent, almost - well, I would say brilliant woman - a woman without any formal education. She spoke Yiddish, spoke a very fluent English. She was really a generation ahead of her time. She belonged to the literary union, to the flower club. She was the one who was responsible for the Beacon Club. Do you know what the Beacon Club is?

CM: Definitely.

R: I think she started the Beacon Club at that time. One of her projects was that she used to write Jewish plays. She was a self-educated woman.

F: What is the Beacon Club?

R: Beacon Club is help for the blind?

CM: Yes.

R: Right. They used to go down to the Home for the Blind, take the people out and interest them in outside activities.

F: It is not a Jewish organization?

R: Oh, no.

CM: It is still sponsored by the Council of Jewish Women.

R: By Council, right. She was strong Council, right.

F: So Leah grew up and she went to Smith.

R: Right.

F: Got a BA there?

R: Right, in psychology. Then she went to St. Louis University. She got her Masters Degree in social work.

F: And has she worked?

R: Oh, she's in it today. She's been in it all these years.

F: What does she do now?

F: She is in charge of, for the State of Maine, family day care. She is the manager of Family Day Care.

F: Does that mean she spends a lot of time traveling?

R: No, she doesn't travel at all. She is in the building on Forest Avenue.

CM: Forest Avenue.

R: Right, yuh.

F: Was her home in which she grew up Orthodox?

R: No.

F: And what synagogue did her parents go to?

R: Etz Chaim. Her father broke away. Hers was one of the first families to break away from Etz Chaim to Temple Beth-El. He and Sol Chasson and a few others.

F: Let's take the service. What were you in, the Infantry?

R: I was in Army Ordnance.

F: Where were you stationed in Europe?

R: I was stationed in Amberg. Did you ever hear of I.F. Stone?

F: Yuh.

R: Do you know him? You know of him?

F: Yes.

R: I have here a book called Underground to Palestine in which Stone detailed his experiences. He went to Germany to take the trip over the mountains to Italy and to come over with the Aliyahbet to what is now Israel. And in his book he tells of how he was on his way to Germany. He was supposed to go to Bamberg which was the scene of the American Constabulary forces in Germany. Somehow or other he lost his way. Instead of going to Bamberg, he found himself in Amberg which was in Bavaria. And he tells in his book how he went into the Yiddish office there and he was talking to people and he saw two pictures on the wall. It was a very, very small picture of Theodore Hertzl and a much larger picture of an American Jewish soldier from Portland, Maine. And he mentions the name, and it's really quite interesting because I had spent a lot of time with DP's. They detailed their experiences with me. They call me, Meshiach. Of course, there were a lot of Jewish boys in the Army and, of course, we did everything we could for them. We even stole from the Army and gave it to them and we helped them from the sanitarium into workshops.

F: Okay, now. Stop! You are getting ahead of me. You were in Amberg?

R: Want the whole? [F: Yes] Okay. We landed in St. Lo. This was in about March of 1944. I had more time overseas than I did in the States. March of 1944 we went to St. Lo. We went up to the Saar area. Since I was the only one in the outfit who spoke French, I was the rear guard. So my outfit went to the Saar and I was the rear guard. And in French I knew "droit" is right and "gauche" is left, but nobody ever told me about "toute droite" which means straight ahead. So I wound up in Paris and

the rest of the outfit was up in the Saar area. I wound up on a corner in Paris because I didn't know what "toute droite" was [Laughs]. At any rate, we went to the Saar area. We were in the Third Army. We were in Patton's group, and we serviced the tanks. We used to hopscotch with the way he worked the Army. From there, we went up into Luxemburg. We were in Luxemburg at the time of the Bulge. After the Bulge we crossed over into Germany. I was in Buchenwald when it was freed.

F: Okay, stop right there! You were there when it was freed? What do you mean by you were there when it was freed?

R: Well, the tanks went through Buchenwald and we were servicing them and so we were there at the time.

F: Let's be exact about this.

R: Three days later.

F: Three days after they first entered Buchenwald [R: Right], you were there?

R: Yuh.

F: What did you see there?

R: Well, I'll have to pick up some of the pictures that I took from Buchenwald.

F: Oh, you did? Would you pick up those at some time soon?

R: I'd be glad to.

F: I'd very much appreciate it.

R: All right. And then, of course, subsequent to that Eisenhower issued that famous pronunciamento where he made all the burghers from all the communities around go through there.

F: Were you there when they were doing that?

R: No, I wasn't there at that time. We kept on going.

F: So you were only in Buchenwald for three or four days?

R: We set up a camp. We were outside of Buchenwald.

F: Now, prior to going into Buchenwald, what preparations were you told to make? In Patton's Third Army, what preparations were being made to go into the camps? Were the surgical people briefed? Were the dietary people briefed? How many Jewish chaplains did they get together to go in? What was done?

R: Okay.

F: You know what I am getting at?

R: I know what you are getting at. From my experience, I would say that the whole thing came as a terrible shock.

F: Even though Eisenhower was fully informed.

R: Well, you see, I didn't even know that.

F: You didn't know that?

R: No, I didn't know that.

F: So that those of you who . . .

R: It was a complete trauma. When we went in there, nobody expected anything like this. Nobody knew it was going to happen. Nobody knew what we were going to be confronted with. Now I don't know whether Patton knew or not. I know that the officers themselves did not know. It was like a bombshell. It was a completely unsettling experience for them to be confronted by a situation like this. They didn't believe it was possible. Of course, the only thing was the evidence was around there for a long time. Nobody was in a hurry to take it away. I guess this was part of the deal, too, that they were going to leave it there. They wanted it there. They wanted everybody to see it, but I don't think that anybody was prepared for it.

F: No special steps were taken by the Army in which you were involved, Patton's Third Army [R: No]. You never saw any special things. You never saw any briefings. You never saw anything, right?

R: No. The only thing that was done was for the living.

F: Yuh, I am concerned about the living. I want to get there.

R: All right. The living they took care of immediately. As a matter of fact, I was with the living. My first exposure to the living was in the sanitarium which was run at that time

by UNRRA. Well, I was intimately involved and so I had a great deal of dealings with the personnel. For the most part they were opportunists. I won't say that they were not good to the DP's. The care was excellent. The food was very good but they made a lot of money on the deal. And this particular guy was running cars up into Switzerland through third parties and making a lot of money. However, the first thing that happened was they took all the DP's who were alive and they put them into sanitariums and they gave them excellent care.

F: I doubt it.

R: What's that?

F: I doubt it.

R: I don't know, of course, I like to relate . . .

F: Let's just talk about what you saw [R: Yuh]. You saw . . .

R: Well, when I went in, they were still in the pens.

F: They were still in the pens.

R: The pens were opened, but . . .

F: They were still there.

R: Yuh.

F: Were there food trucks in there?

R: Yuh - right.

F: Special diet food trucks? No.

R: No. Of course, there weren't special trucks. They had food trucks and, of course, many of them died in the camps.

F: Damn right, damn right!

R: Well, of course, that is true. That is why I say that there was no special care. In terms of what they should have had, in terms of the expenditures, of course, I wasn't aware of what went on.

F: You are talking about 30,000 people dying after liberation.

R: Well, I believe it. I believe it! Because look, it was the first time they had any food. They gluttonized themselves and they filled themselves and this went on for a long time. As a matter of fact, we had organized a project of food parcels and clothing parcels. Leah's father was in the wholesale candy business and they had a warehouse on Plum Street and they had merchandise and material coming in from the whole community. And they used to send it to Amberg. So we had a sort of lift going. But there were no such things as special diets.

F: And no teams of doctors in those four days or five days.

R: I don't believe it. No teams.

F: You didn't see a whole lot of Jewish Chaplains around, did you?

R: Oh, no. The Chaplains didn't come in until afterwards. There was no special care as such, but mine is fragmentary. I don't know the complete picture. I don't know to this day . . .

F: I am just asking you what you, yourself, saw.

R: No, I didn't see any special preparations. Just one of those things where they came in. Of course, when the tankers came in, the guards had already gone anyway. They didn't stick around to see what was going to happen. They took off. So the DP's were more or less on their own. And, of course, when they came in they showered them with food in their ignorance. This is where they lost a great many of them.

F: Then you moved out of there.

R: We moved out of there.

F: Did you go take over any other camps? Labor camps or anything?

R: We were not too far from many camps. As a matter of fact, we went up to Amberg and we were very close to a community called Straubing which was maybe 20 kilometers. It was also a small town. My reaction at the time, of course, wasn't particularly unique, anymore than it would have been unique to the other Jewish boys in the service. As far as I was concerned, these were for the most part slaughtered Jews, and these were my kind of people. These were the kind of people who I understood, not only the language, but their mannerisms and their thinking, their philosophy. Now all the time I was with them, I was maybe the single big shot in the community. As a matter of fact, Sid Ginsberg came to visit me from another outfit. He heard I was in town. They were living at the sanitarium. As quickly as they improved sufficiently, they

were taken out of there. There was a shul in town which had been converted by the Nazis, to show their great respect, into a horse stall for the cavalry units stationed there. When the military government came in, the first thing they did was re-convert it to a shul. They had dedication ceremonies where they had the local General and they had the Jewish Chaplain. I led the first service there.

F: It was a very moving moment for you.

R: Oh, yuh. As a matter of fact, up until the time I went up to the bimah I had forgotten the melody for the service. It was just one of those things, I couldn't remember. Fortunately, I came through at the right time. But these were people who I understood, even though I knew that they were leading me on, flattering me. Still they were my people and the same kind of people like my grandparents and all my relatives. So I was really working with my own people, and all the Jewish boys in the area did the same thing.

F: But that wasn't your major job.

R: Well, I was lucky at the time. I was a staff sargeant. We had transferred all the men out of the outfit so there was a supply man and I was in charge of the office. So all I did was make up the morning report and I had a vehicle for the rest of the day to myself, so I could spend it with them and I did. And so anything that went on, anything of any consequence, they usually deferred to me because it was to their advantage. I have pictures of them. I have a little desk set that I have in the school today that they gave me on my birthday with all their names on it. It was a beautiful relationship. The people on the committee were, for the most part, the cultured people. One in particular who was a journalist. He subsequently went to Israel. Another was an intellectual from Poland. Most of them were Polish Jews who subsequently came to this country. Five years ago, I went to the wedding of the daughter of one of the men. I had lost touch with him for 20 years. I left there in 1946, came here, and then I lost touch with him. One day I picked up Land and Life, the Jewish National Fund magazine and I saw a picture of a guy by the name of Pulvermacher. What a name, huh? He was planting trees in Israel. It said he came from Brooklyn, New York. Well, that night, as soon as I saw the picture, I went to the telephone and I called Brooklyn information and she said, "You must be out of your mind." I knew his name was Yitzchak Pulvermacher. She said, "You expect me to locate him?" I said, "I would be very much surprised if there was another Jew in all of Brooklyn by that name." [All: Laugh]

Well, by God she got him and the next voice I heard was Yitzchak's voice and then I broke down [Laughs]. So first I spoke to him in Hebrew. I spoke a little Hebrew, and I spoke a little Yiddish and then I spoke Jewish and by God he recognized my voice!

F: And so you went to the wedding?

R: Four years later, and then we corresponded. I went to the wedding. You won't believe it. Leah and I went up and we got off the plane and we took a cab to the Temple. And the Temple was like nothing you see around here with elevators and dressing rooms and the whole bit. [All: Laugh] I saw her brother. As a matter of fact, I had slept one night in a haystack with her and his sister because there was no place else to sleep and we all slept together. It was a communal haystack [F: Laughs]. I saw her brother who was a big bulvon - you know, he was a shtik, just a nothing. But I recognized him and I said, "David," and he turned around and he didn't recognize me. Then he said, "Moishe." He recognized me and then I went over to her, when I saw her - his wife. She was like this (fat) with black bread and potatoes, and here she was wearing a beautiful brocade gown with a beehive hairdo and we were like brother and sister in those days and it was something else again. Then during the course of the wedding, I spoke about their present estate. He's got a factory now and he manufactures children's clothing and he goes to Isreal three or four times a year. He's a Labor Zionist and most of the Polish Jews were Socialist Labor Zionists. I was talking with, dancing with Edja and I said, "Look, Edja, look what happened. Thank God!" She says, "Moishe, yes, but you wouldn't have believed the first five years that we were over here. Rats lived better than we did. But God was good to us." A couple came over to me, a beautiful young girl, so I thought, in a georgeous lavender gown and she says, "Mr. Rubinoff, do you remember me?" I said, "Gee, my dear, I don't, I'm sorry to say." She says, "You know, I had the first baby at Amberg and I was in the hospital and you brought some candy." I says, "That was a big deal!" She says, "In those days, it was a big deal." We were sitting at the table and the fellow beside me says, "Mr. Rubinoff, do you remember me?" I say, "Gee, I don't." I knew intimately maybe 20-25 people but the others came and went. So he identified himself. "My name is Wolf. I am a Cantor in a Conservative congregation in Washington, D.C. You're in Portland. When you go there, say hello to Kurt Messerschmidt." Well, subsequently at a Bar Mitzvah, I showed Sonya the picture and she says, "Kurt and I have seen them a dozen times." So I was talking with the husband, with Yitzchak, a very fine boy at that time. We were talking about the old days and he says, "Moishe, I don't want you to think that I am saying anything for aggrandisement." He says, "I want you to see something." So he pulled out his wallet and he took out a picture and he says, "There

are very few people I show this to." So there were two people in the picture, one was Yitzchak and the other one was Golda. He says, "She's been here many times for fund drives. Moishe, you can believe me, when she comes here for a fund drive, she gets money. A lot of it is mine, but there are plenty of other people who give, too." This is the kind of guy he is. He never lost his love for Israel. He shows it and he produces. So now, we've never lost touch. It was eerie. It was a sequel that I never believed possible. You know, these things happen in books. And there is another sequel that is very interesting. About three years ago, my younger son Steve, who now works for LEAA in Augusta, and I were talking about the old days. I don't know how the conversation got around to Stone. Steve was an administrative aide his last year in school in Muskie's office. He was supposed to go in his Junior year with Kyros, but Kyros shook him off for a girl secretary.

F: How unusual!

R: How unusual.

F: For Kyros . . . [Laughs]

R: So the next year, Grossman, his government professor, got him into Muskie's office. So he says, "One day I had to take a cab. It was raining cats and dogs. I got into a cab and we were going along and the cab driver asked me if I minded if he stopped for another passenger. So an old guy gets into the cab, sits down beside me and in the course of a conversation I happen to mention a name in Portland, Maine and he asked me what my name was. I told him I was Steve Rubinoff. He told me that many years prior, he had written a story about his experiences in Germany and about a Jewish soldier from Portland, Maine, Maurice Rubinoff." Steve told him it was his father. It was I.F. Stone. How about that? Isn't that something?

F: What is the name of the book?

R: Underground to Israel. Ada Palmer first got the book and one night she called my mother-in-law. Of course, my mother-in-law was always glad to have something good to say about me [All: Laugh]. So when she heard about the book she couldn't wait. We've got a copy around somewhere.

F: We've got it at the University, too, I know.

R: But to have this thing happen after so many years! Of course, I guess he had just finished with his newsletter there. I guess he discontinued that, but this was another little sequel. So where do we go from here now?

F: Now I want to go back a minute.

R: Sure.

Mrs.R: Here is a story I wrote about it.[BRINGS IN A PAPER]

F: Oh, you have.

R: This is a story that she wrote.

F: All right. Now look, this is in my line [R: Yuh]. Obviously, this is what I do for a living.

R: This is a little testimonial.

F: Okay. It makes the question I have to ask you even harder. By the way, is there any chance that we can copy this?

R: Yuh. It's a public record.

Mrs.R: I didn't even see what I am giving you. It was all together somewhere.

F: Well, we would like to xerox this. We will keep it with our records, all right? May we?

PA: We will take it and bring it back tomorrow or the next day.

F: Your experiences are incredible and they are heartwarming to you because of the things that you were able to do.

Mrs. R: This is the stuff that they put together to say where people came from.

F: Let me see that.

PA: That was a long time ago.

Mrs. R: Yuh, they put together all the names of the people and where they came from. I can't even see it, I am so blurry-eyed. But see if you can put it together.

F: Look, there are not too many of these around anymore. These are incredible, for my own sake [R: Okay]. For my class, could I xerox this? Would you mind?

R: Why should I mind?

F: Because the people don't understand how they did this.

R: I also have somewhere a couple of articles that they sent them from Germany.

F: Now I want to go back. Your experience was remarkable, humane, heartwarming.

R: It was a natural reaction actually.

F: Now you know what I am going to ask you. You were with Patton's Third Army. I notice the books that you read and I am sure you have read many, many of them on this whole period of time. You know the reputation of Patton and his Third Army, the way he treated the Jews and the misplaced people.

R: He was very good to us. As far as the enlisted men were concerned, he was terrific.

F: Were you ever made aware of his attitudes about the Jews?

R: Never.

F: While you were working?

R: No, never did. I don't know what you may have heard. I don't really know.

F: He was the worst.

R: I don't doubt that for a minute, because he wasn't a very compassionate man and the Jews must have been negative to him, I am sure.

F: He is one who insisted that there be no distinction made between a Jewish concentration camp prisoner and any old prisoner.

R: Yuh, I'd believe that.

F: But you didn't notice that, personally?

R: No, it was never brought to my attention, nor was I aware of it as a soldier in those days.

F: While you were gone, your wife was a social worker so she didn't have trouble.

R: She was a social worker, right.

F: So she just sat here and pined for you.

R: Well, that's the way the story goes! She was living here in Portland at that time and working.

F: I'd just like to get the straight scoop. Did you pine for him while he was overseas, Mrs. Rubinoff?

Mrs. R: How could you not pine for him [All: Chuckles]?

CM: How did you pine?

Mrs. R: He made love to all the other girls out there and I pined. I stayed home.

R: She pined at Pine Street. Listen, it was very easy.

F: And you pined.

R: Leah, you know that there was an Army directive against fraternizing.

Mrs. R: You know, I was a married woman. You'd go to USO, right? And all the guys would want to make passes at me because I was a married woman. No problems, right? He's out there having a good time in Germany and I refused these opportunities!

R: I told you that I wasn't having a good time!

Mrs. R: Then he comes home and brings pictures of it, right?

F: But you can hold that over him for the rest of his life, right? [All: Laugh]

R: Never did. [All: Laugh] Live and let live.

PA: Were you in Boston then, or Portland?

Mrs. R: I was in Portland. Who could afford to live in Boston? I came home to live with my family.

CM: You might as well pine if you are going to be in Portland.

Mrs. R: Well, I got very busy with the USO and the young children. I was with the children. I was with teenagers at the Jewish Community Center and I worked.

F: Did you ever have anything to do with the displaced people who came over after the war?

Mrs. R: No, all I did was help with that project. Remember?

R: Yuh, you and your father.

Mrs. R: Yuh, well, we had a drive asking for clothes and for medicine. So we organized with the Rabbi, who got us the money.

R: Who was the Rabbi at that time? Lewittes?

Mrs. R: No, no. Greenbaum, lovely man. And his beautiful wife. I'll never forget it. I had never known a Rebbitsen in my life. She was very beautiful. One night she was at my house until 9 p.m. or so and my father says, "Don't let her to go home alone. We've got to take her home." So he had to walk her home, you know. You couldn't let the beautiful Rebbitsen go out at night [All: Chuckle]. Well, anyway, they helped us with the food and with the money. Then we got the Jewish community to help us with the packages and we went down to Rubinsky's clothing, Pinetree Clothing. We had an assembly line. Five-pound packages, we had to list everything that was in there. Dr. Davidson, Gisela, brought us the dextrose and we had it packaged and we sent it out. Then you arranged for us to be able to send something to the Rabbi in England [F: Oh]. A larger package.

F: You sent these to his people over in London?

R: Yuh, right.

Mrs. R: He gave us a list of names and each person we could send it to. We didn't know who they were, but we put underwear, womens', you know. And cans of food. You know, the whole community turned out to send this, and the money was hard to get for mailing. Mail was very expensive. The Rabbi did that through the Jewish Federation, I think. We got some very beautiful letters, all those thank-you letters that came. I still have them. People thanked us for having found their families.

R: Remember the family from Detroit whom we located? The soldiers were all sending letters on behalf of the DP's. We would send them to all the publications and Jewish organizations to try to find relatives. Those people all came through the concentration camps. It is tremendous, fantastic what the mind will do. They all tried to remember an address of somebody close to them in the States or in Canada. When I came back to Portland, as a matter of fact, Earl Brand was waiting to greet me. I had corresponded with a cousin of his in Uruguay and the cousin had written him. Earl wanted to thank me here. There was this other family whose

relatives we located in Detroit. They sent packages and money and when it got there, the boy who was in the sanitarium had already died. He knew about his relatives and he knew he would be able to come to this country, but he just didn't have the strength to survive.

Mrs. R: And they wrote to thank us for having done that, for having tried. Then there was a letter written in the paper in Yiddish which I couldn't understand. I went around the whole community to have someone read it for me so I could translate it.

R: I am sure there are a lot of stories like that. I was fortunate in that I went over early. I didn't have enough points to get out so it meant that I was there for a year after the war ended and that gave me a little bit more time with them. Most of the boys had already been redeployed to the States. Of course, for me it was no hardship because I had plenty of time. I'll never forget one day when our outfit moved. I used to take my vehicle in the morning and go up to the D.P. Camp. When I would get there I'd take off my 45 and leave it. I used to stay for the weekend sometimes. One day I went back to my post and inadvertently I had left my 45 behind. Well, that afternoon there is a knock on my door and one of the girls had come to tell me that I had left it. They were afraid. You see, the only way they could survive was outside of those little jobs. They used to play the black market for whatever they could get and so they used to be raided every once in awhile by the military government. They had taken that 45 and hid it under a great big pile of potatoes in the cellar. So I packed her into the vehicle and went back and picked it up. I was able to spend a lot of time with them. What they used to do for us was prepare all kinds of delicacies like latkes, you know.

Mrs. R: And then he would write me a letter and say, "I think I might be having to come home!" [All: Chuckle]

F: What about the German people in Amberg? What were your personal experiences?

R: Of course, I was one of the conquerers. In Amberg, I met a great many people and for the most part they were subservient. Number one, there weren't too many men around, very few younger men. Most of the people in town were old people and women. The men had all been in the Army and they were in prisoner-of-war camps. Many of them were in Russia. They didn't know whether they would ever come back or not. So, for the most part, they saw us as soldiers. That was the attitude. Insofar as the DP's were concerned, we found that the DP's got along very well with the people in the town. Of course, there were instances where

the bitterness did come out, but at that time the Germans were pretty much cowed.

F: At least in your area.

R: In my area only.

F: Okay.

R: Let me tell you about an interesting experience. You know what a kapo is?

F: To be sure.

R: Okay, we had a fellow who was the head of the Jewish community. I forget his name. A big, strong, husky, handsome, terrific fellow. The day wasn't long enough for him to work for the community. There wasn't enough that he could do for the community. I had been there about five months. There were all these Jews going around from one community to another trying to find relatives, friends. Somebody came in and fingered him for a kapo. The next day he was gone and we never heard from him again. Of course, the story was, in those days they used to have their own kangaroo courts. Whatever they did, it was an interesting experience. In terms of the relationships among themselves, it was really quite revealing.

Mrs. R: Did you tell them about the wedding we went to?

PA: Yes, he did.

R: Wasn't that something?

Mrs. R: It was an overwhelming experience. I got in and then they saw him and tears were flowing and I was so alone.

R: You wouldn't believe those people.

Mrs. R: He was the Messiah! That's what they called him.

R: Interestingly enough, the other group from the marriage were also Flüchtling, also refugees. They gravitate to each other. They find a lot of comfort and solace with each other and, of course, they are always together. They meet together and everything else. It was unbelievable. It's just something you can't put into words because it reads like fiction rather than truth. To have all these things come out like this. You know, it is enough to have the initial experience, but it is something else to be able to live it again, to have that kind of a sequence.

F: Well, so you came back to Portland after the service.

R: In 1946 I came back to Portland.

F: Why did you decide to stay in Portland?

R: Well, Leah was here already.

Mrs. R: I had a job.

R: And we felt that we were more comfortable here. We always liked Portland. We felt that this was our cup of tea because we could go to the big city anytime we wanted to, but we always had an affection for the community and the areas of the town. We grew up on the Hill. We always loved it, and we felt very happy here. I went to work at that time with Saul Gerber, of all things, selling storm windows. Saul had four children and we had none at the time. Whenever we'd get a check, Saul used to split it in half. I used to say, "Saul, you've got four children and I don't have any," and he said, "You work just as hard as I do." That was quite unusual for a man.

F: How long did it take before you got the business that you now have?

R: Well, Leah's father was in the wholesale candy business at that time, had been for 50 years. He was one of the old established businessmen.

F: So you went to work with her father?

R: Yes, in about 1953 I went on the road for him. Then is when I started to teach. I used to go up to Berlin, New Hampshire when it was a two day trip. I started going on Sunday to Bath, to Kramer - once a week. I used to get up at 6 a.m. and go to Bath. Then I used to come back and I used to go to Rockland and then come home about two p.m.

F: What were you doing? Teaching what?

R: Just teaching Hebrew. You know, a general Hebrew teacher.

F: Where did you learn this Hebrew? You weren't even Bar Mitzvahed.

R: The Yiddish, I knew. The liturgy I knew, too. I was able to read very well and I knew the prayers. Well, okay. My grandfather in Boston, the Rabbi, when I used to go to visit with him, which was very frequently, we used to sit down and study together. He couldn't

do it with his own children. They had gone away from the fold, so I used to sit down with him. Evidently I must have picked up a great deal from him in terms of the Bible and Torah itself. Actually, in terms of many of the things that I am doing today, I knew very little. But of the other, the Torah and the five books of Moses, I picked up a great deal from my grandfather. I still didn't know any Hebrew at all and my knowledge of Jewish history went only as far as the average individual. It went from creation to the death of Moses. The interval from then on none of us studied at all. It wasn't taught to us.

F: How did you manage?

R: Okay. I started in once a week in Bath and in Rockland. Then when I was traveling to Berlin, New Hampshire, somehow or other they found out that I had some experience. I met some of the people there, the Jewish townspeople. We sat down to discuss the possibility of my teaching. They had a lovely little Shul there and a little parish house behind the Shul. So, to check out my credentials, they came down to Portland. They also used to come to Portland to buy their meat from Morris Blumenthal. I grew up with him and so we knew each other for many, many years. So when they came to him and said, "What do you know about Maurice Rubinoff as a Hebrew Teacher," he gave me a tremendous recommendation! He said, "Maurice Rubinoff, how does he get to be a Hebrew teacher??"

F: I still want to know how Maurice Rubinoff got to be a Hebrew teacher.

PA: How were you prepared to be a Hebrew teacher?

R: Okay. I told you where my strengths lay.

F: Did you study at night or something? What did you do?

R: No, no. My strengths were in reading, right? And in prayer and in the Chumash. Some of the other things I had a smattering of, but very, very little. So when I started to teach the children, actually what they were interested in primarily at that time was the ability to read. Well, I was qualified to do that. I could teach that. I knew that.

F: Well, why did you want to? Why did you start doing that?

R: I enjoyed doing it. Well, two things.

Mrs. R: His identification with the Jewishness [R: Yuh, this was part of it]. It started when he was very little [R: Yuh, I always felt close to Judaism]. He'd go to the Synagogue when his father died, every morning and every night.

F: So did every one of them. I want to figure out why he is different. I'm still trying to figure it out. Your answers are not good enough. They aren't explanatory enough.

R: Well, number one, this identification.

F: But everybody identified. How come you are standing out in the middle of this?

R: I don't really know, except that, of course, I enjoyed doing it. It was an enjoyable experience to me. There is another thing that's a family thing, too, and I think that maybe this is important. Coming from a grandfather who was a baal kore and able to read the Torah as a professional, and from my grandfather in Boston, who was a Rabbi, I think I always had an inferiority complex in that field. I think this was always a part of it. I always felt that maybe I was less than adequate in that direction. It bothered me, to what extent I didn't realize, I don't believe, at that time. I always had a need to improve myself. Now, the opportunities for that around here were nil and I think that the opportunity that presented itself was teaching. While I was teaching, I was learning. Let's face it, all the Hebrew that I know today stems from the time that I started to teach. Today I have a strong passive vocabulary, a less than adequate active vocabulary. I understand it pretty well. I speak it haltingly. But whatever I do, I learned while I was teaching.

F: So here you are. You are raising a family [R: Yuh], you are in a business, and you are selling on the road. And you are also teaching Hebrew around Maine or around New England.

R: Right, right. Teaching in Berlin.

F: All right. And you do teach in the Portland Hebrew School, now. One afternoon a week or something?

R: Twice a week and Saturday morning. Today I went to North Conway. From North Conway I came back and went to Boothbay Harbor. That's my metabolism. I enjoy being out, I enjoy what I am doing, and to me it is no hardship. I don't consider it work.

F: You weren't making any money off of Hebrew teaching, were you?

R: Oh, yes. Always. That was a part of the consideration, too. I was being paid in Berlin, New Hampshire.

F: Not very much.

R: Well, at the end I was getting a couple of thousand dollars a year. Not only that, I had a parish home. They gave it to me to use. Besides that, I was a big shot. I used to come up. I used to prepare the kids for Bar Mitzvah. We used to come up there for weekends.

F: You went up there with him?

Mrs. R: I went up there.

R: What I used to do at the Bar Mitzvah you wouldn't believe. I used to run the service, lead the service. I prepared the boy and also I used to give the charge to the Bar Mitzvah, read the Torah, and deliver the sermon. This was quite an experience. It was an enjoyable experience. I made a little income from it, and I enjoyed it. I used to work with the mothers. They used to come in and we used to run functions on all the holidays. It was a lovely experience, yuh.

F: This company, Portland Confectionary and Specialty Company - the major part of it is selling on the road [R: Right]. Are you a wholesaler?

R: Right.

F: So you had to be out selling all the time.

R: Right, okay. I had a warehouse for five years. I gave up the warehouse.

F: Are you working harder or less hard?

R: Well, now, the biggest part of my operation is selling today.

F: How many people work for you?

R: Well, now I am working for myself. When I had the warehouse, I had people. The reason I gave up the warehouse is because I was teaching at the same time. See, I had left the Temple school at that time. I decided that I was going to spend all my time in the business so I left the Temple and they got another teacher to replace me. Around Christmas time Rabbi Sky and Eddy Sacknoff came by. They had to let the teacher go. They came down and asked if I would come back. I wasn't particularly in-

terested but I felt that it was something that I had to do, so I went back again. I've been teaching ever since. Teaching and working at the same time.

F: When do the two of you ever sit down to dinner at the same time?

R: Oh, we do, we do.

Mrs. R: Late [Laughs]!

F: In the old days, wasn't it tough?

R: Look, who looks at tough or easy? You do it, that's all.

Mrs. R: Maybe it was tough for the children [Laughs].

R: Leah always worked hard. Leah puts in more hours than you would believe. Sixty hours, 70 hours are nothing for her, but she is doing work that she enjoys and I am doing work that I enjoy.

F: All right, we will go back to 1946.

R: Okay.

F: You are back in Portland.

R: I am back in Portland, working.

F: And you start having kids. Now, do both of you go back into the Synagogue immediately? Are you in the Synagogue?

R: I am not in the Synagogue, no.

F: Did you go back up to Newbury Street Shul?

R: I shouldn't say I didn't, because actually Harold Woolf and I were still very, very active. Since we were young people and they needed young people, we did a great deal of work for the Synagogue.

F: The Newbury Street Synagogue?

R: No, the Congress Street Shul. Etz Chaim.

F: You would be found in Etz Chaim on High Holidays and on Saturday morning?

R: Right, yuh.

F: You would still be there on Saturday morning?

R: Well, not as much, not as much.

F: But sometimes?

R: Sometimes, yuh, right. But I was active there. I was also on the Vaad in those days.

F: You were on the Vaad Hoir?

R: Vaad Hoir, right. I was the treasurer of the Etz Chaim and I was on the Vaad.

F: So all of a sudden you heard people saying that they were going to build a Temple out here, a Conservative Temple. You heard friends of yours talking about that.

R: I wasn't involved in that at all.

Mrs. R: I joined it.

F: What did you think of it when you heard about it?

R: Well, I wasn't interested for the simple reason that my interests and my sympathy lay with Etz Chaim. I was probably more conversant than most of them with the service and the workings of the Shul, and I stayed with that. I wasn't particularly interested in the English services that they would offer or the late Friday night service, so I still stayed. I was Orthodox oriented, even though I wasn't a practicing Orthodox Jew.

F: Now in your home, was your home kosher?

Mrs. R: No.

R: Oh, you see, this is the story. She came from an emancipated family. I gave you some insight into her mother [F: Yuh]. Her father, too, was pretty much the same way because her mother had a very strong personality and her mother and father were interested in Temple. So the home was the way her mother ran the home, and Leah didn't have the knowledge or interest in it. So I stayed with Etz Chaim. When I left Etz Chaim is when they started to build the new Shul on Noyes Street.

F: Okay, were you participating in fund raising for that?

R: Yuh, I was, because many of my friends, the young people, were interested in it. There was an active group of six people who actually built the Shul. I was the poorest among them and I was the treasurer of the organization that built the Shul.

F: Who were the other five?

R: Bert Silverman, Harold Woolf, Mickey Weisenthal were the young people. The older people were Abe Levey, Billy Goodman, and Abe Segal. As a matter of fact, they have a big plaque there. If you ever go into the Shul [F: I have] you will see my name in the middle of the plaque.

F: Okay, now listen. Did you begin after they decided to do it or were you in on it from the beginning?

R: I was there at the beginning.

F: Okay, let's go back to the Portland Hebrew School, then.

R: Okay, that's how I got in. At that time I was the Administrator of the Portland Hebrew School.

F: What year did you start doing that?

R: I don't even remember. You can get it from the dates of the Shul because it was the year before the Shul opened.

F: Okay, about 1953?

R: Well, if the Shul opened in 1954, it was 1953.

F: Okay. Now, how did you get involved in the Hebrew School?

R: I was one of the so-called young people in town, and Danny Konnetsky had been in it for three or four years. They were looking for the sacrificial lamb to take over. I was an alumnus, albeit not one that they were proud of, of the Portland Hebrew School, but they knew of me. Look, I was close to many of the people then. I knew the Rabbi very well, it was Bekritsky. So I took over the job from Danny and the Synagogue started as an extension of the Portland Hebrew School. It was called Portland Hebrew School-Synagogue Incorporated. And so, I was in it from the onset.

F: Do you remember the stages in the planning?

R: Yes, I do, because I used to write all the checks to the contractor.

F: Okay. Let's start with the original idea, which was to build a Hebrew School, correct?

R: Right.

F: Originally to build a Hebrew School - not a Synagogue.

R: You're right. Because they were afraid to come out with the Synagogue because they had Shaarey Tphiloh to contend with. At that time everything was Shaarey Tphiloh. You are right, it was going to be a Hebrew School because the bulk of the Jewish population was then in the Woodfords area.

F: That's right,and it couldn't get up to the . . .

R: Pearl Street.

F: All right. Now, you had to go to the Federation [R: Right] to get some permission to raise the funds, correct?

R: Yuh.

F: And you went to the Federation with the plan to build a Portland Hebrew School [R: Right]. The reason that you had to go to the Federation was because otherwise they wouldn't have let you go on a fund raising drive to do this.

R: Right, because even at that time, Temple Beth El had a lot of people on Federation and they were afraid of Beth El's reaction to a Synagogue one block away from them.

F: I want to know what happened. There are four stories, I want to know yours [R: Yuh].

R: I'll tell you the truth. Unless I heard the stories, I don't even remember.

F: Okay, let me put it this way. When this plan came about [R: Yuh] and you ended up by building the Synagogue as well as a Hebrew School [R: Yuh, right] was this because people really felt, as you remember it, that you ought to do that also because there obviously was a need?

R: Yuh, well, there was not only a need but the other thought was that since you are going on a project this ambitious, it would be stupid not to build a Synagogue at the same time [F: Okay] and have it in one edifice. If my memory serves me right, the thing that they concentrated on initially was the school section.

As a matter of fact, that was the one that was first ready for occupancy. And as I recall it, I think that the first service they had in the Shul was on Pesach. I'm not too clear on that, but the school was ready before the Synagogue was. I remember vividly the day that we left the Hebrew School on Pearl Street. The kids all got into the bus and they transported them to Noyes Street. Of course, the Rabbi was the teacher and the Principal of the Hebrew School. So he was standing on the steps and I said, "Rabbi, you gonna leave the door open?" He says, "You're the President, I'm only the Principal - you close it!" So I went up and closed it. But I remember that day because they took the children and I had quite a ceremony of transporting them. This was the first functioning part of the building - the Hebrew School. And, oh yes, the architect was a man from Lawrence who was Thelma Resnick's husband, right? The architect was a politician from Lawrence. He was also running for office there. The situation was that he used to use the money we gave him for his campaign. So, after awhile, when I would issue checks,they would be made out jointly to the contractor and the sub-contractor. This was the only way the sub-contractors could be sure of getting their money!

F: Now, how long did you remain with the Hebrew School? How long were you the Director?

R: Well, I was the administrative head of the Hebrew School all through building and subsequent to that because my office was in the new building. Now, a very strange thing happened at the time. They needed teachers all the time at the Portland Hebrew School. I used to go to New York to hire teachers for the Portland Hebrew School. I used to go up with Dave Rubinoff and Rabbi Bekritsky. We used to meet at the Hotel Edison.

F: I always stay there, and it is still cheap! [Laughs]

R: Okay, yuh.

F: I sometimes go there and it's near any theater and any play anywhere.

R: It was fun. It was a lot of fun except the second and third day the Rabbi would come up and we used to have to eat in nature food restaurants - this kind of thing [All: Chuckle]. At any rate, I used to go up and interview the teachers with the Rabbi and Dave. Subsequent to that, somebody suggested, "Well, maybe Moishe could teach at the Portland Hebrew School." Even though I had a pretty good relationship with Rabbi Bekritsky, that didn't sit too

well with him because I wasn't Orthodox enough for him. I wasn't a Shomer Shabbes.

F: That's right.

R: I was not a Shomer Shabbes and he didn't think that I ought to be teaching there, and so I didn't. Some time not too long after that they lost a teacher at the Temple. Eddy Sacknoff had heard that I had been doing some practice teaching and he came over. They were willing to speculate so they gambled. They said, "Well, we'll take a chance on Maurice," and so I started to teach there. This was about 17 years ago.

F: And you still do?

R: Yuh.

F: Two afternoons a week.

R: Yuh, for 17 years I've been teaching.

F: You had to rearrange your business around it?

R: Yuh, but it worked out very well. Now even today I can be on the road all day Monday and Wednesday and Friday. Tuesday and Thursday I teach, but I can still be on the road within easy distances of Portland so that I am back here by 3 p.m. It has worked out well. There have been no major problems. Now the extent of my traveling is, I go up as far as North Conway and Bethlehem in one direction. I go to Bar Harbor and Bangor in the other direction. I go to Portsmouth in the third direction.

F: All driving?

R: All driving. I put on about 90,000 miles a year.

F: Why do you do this? Why are you teaching Hebrew School?

R: For two reasons. First of all, I still get a lot of satisfaction from it. It has done a lot for me. It has given me a lot of background that I never would have had, and I feel very comfortable and secure with this background. It gives me something that most of my contemporaries don't have. It has fulfilled my need to acquire this background. I felt very inadequate. When my uncle came to this country it was a year before his Bar Mitzvah and he had already been studying the Gemara. For his Bar Mitzvah, instead of making a speech, he did what they call a pilpul, which is a dissertation on a passage in the Gemara.

I felt like a nothing or a nobody in terms of Jewish intellectual background. Of course, you have to understand, a generation back this was the standard that they used. Today the standards are quite different. But in those days knowledge and understanding was everything and I am a part of that generation. I felt this inadequacy, and subconsciously, maybe, I always felt that I had the need to acquire a greater understanding and a greater knowledge. This it has done for me. Not only that, let's face it, of course the financial aspect of it is also a consideration.

F: Well, it is not that cool.

R: Not that cool, but it doesn't hurt.

F: All right, now. Why do you believe so strongly in Hebrew School education?

R: I didn't say that. We are talking about two different things.

F: You are teaching Hebrew School . . .

R: Yuh, we were talking about what I feel it has done for me.

F: And I changed over. But you have been teaching there for years . . .

R: Oh, okay, right.

F: If my impression is correct, you must therefore believe very strongly.

R: I personally feel that I am imparting a great deal more than they gave me. I feel that what the children are getting today is far superior than the nostalgic good old days when I was going to school.

F: Why do you think it is important for them to have anything?

R: Well, my feeling is this. My feeling has been basically that if anybody makes a choice, they should make it out of knowledge rather than ignorance. If somebody is going to make a choice, let them at least understand what they are missing, what they don't have, and let them make a choice on the basis of understanding rather than complete ignorance. This is part of it. I think that what the children are getting is far superior today than they ever got in the old days.

F: Okay. Let's take from the time that the school opened [R: Yuh] to now. In this period of time what changes have you seen in

the Hebrew School? What are they? Are there more students? Fewer students? Is there more interest? Less interest? Has it changed?

R: Portland is a unique community. The Federation has a law which is fairly flexible, but in by far the majority of cases, it is functional. There is a requirement that every child, boy or girl, go to Hebrew School an "x" number of years before a Bar Mitzvah in order to have a Shabbat Bar Mitzvah in either the Temple or the Shul. And so we get, I would say, probably 95 percent of the potential in the school. That means that most of the Jewish children are going to Hebrew School. There are exceptions for one reason or another, but they do have that. Now, there have been a great many changes in the last 17 years. For the most part, most of them good. For example, there was one change that was initiated last year which is, I think, probably one of the best. We used to have classes three days a week. Originally when I started in, we used to get 40 to 50 children for a Shabbat and this was generally true all over the country. It had degenerated, and this is also universally true, not unique to Portland. It degenerated to a situation where only four, five or six children were coming. So the change that was made last year was that we would have two days of classroom activity. The third day, also a compulsory attendance day, would be for Shabbat service and related activity. No classroom activity as such. And so today, on any given Shabbat, we have a minimum of 50 children to a maximum of 75 children who come every single Shabbat. Now, I think this is important. I think what happens with children when they get older is that they identify with things with which they are familiar. They stay away from the areas in which they are ignorant and areas in which they feel insecure. I think that if we can impart to them this habit of going to services for five years, the time that they are in school, then afterwards this will continue if they decide they do want to go. This is a conscious choice that they are going to have to make. They won't make that choice because they are not conversant with the service, with the prayer book, with the liturgy or anything else. In other words, they will feel comfortable in that kind of a milieu. This is one of the interesting and important changes that we have made. Another change is that they are bringing in the question of relevancy. I think you can go overboard on that. I think when you bring in everything that is relevant you may lose many of the things which appear to be irrelevant but which serve a functional purpose. So what they are doing now is that the children do get Hebrew. They do get some history, and that is a nebulous thing. Somebody made the remark once that history is difficult enough to teach in high school, and at an elementary school level it is almost an impossibility. The years in which they appreciate and understand history are the years in which we

don't have them. I don't know how much we are doing with something like that. But we are doing a great deal with holiday activities so that the children do know the holidays. They know the celebrations that take place on the holiday. It has become a community affair. The Sheliah that the community brings in does a lot to tie up these activities on a community basis. So, I think they are doing a great deal today that they have never done here before and they are doing it on a community basis. Now, this is the other important factor. After so many years, Portland, believe it or not, is almost the pioneer. They are among the few communities in the country that have been able to integrate the schools on a community basis, so that there is no competition between the Temple and the Synagogue. All the resources of the community are directly applied to one set of faculty and to one curriculum. This is a very important development. It has only come about in the last seven years. This has been an important development in the community. They have really gone forward in terms of what they are doing in other parts of the country.

F: So the Hebrew School is alive and healthy.

R: I would say yes. We have the problems that have been chronic to all Hebrew Schools. We still know that we meet at a time that is not conducive to good instruction. They come at the shank of the day when it is a lousy situation at best for the teacher as well as the children. We know that they have a limited attention span at that time of day. However, with all its faults, I think we are doing something that has to be done and I think that by-and-large, we are doing a pretty good job. You have to remember that Portland doesn't have access to the same resources that Boston does or New York does or San Francisco. With all those considerations, I think that the school would rate favorably with communities of its size any place in the country. They have a group of people on the board who are interested. I think maybe in the last four, five years you have seen a development like that. I've been on boards, for example, where they've done it as a civic responsibility without too much interest. I think here they have a great many men and women on the board, women particularly, younger people who have been exposed to school, who know what pedagogy is and who are really interested in doing the best kind of job they can.

F: So the Temple kids and . . .

R: The Shul kids . . .

F: Are going to the same Hebrew School.

R: Right.

F: Sit in the same classes [R: Right] and one of the purposes for them to be there is to prepare themselves for Bar Mitzvah. [R: Well, yuh] That is the only goal when it comes to that. A lot of kids feel that.

R: Oh, I am sure. The parents certainly do 100 percent, or maybe 97 percent. Now actual Bar Mitzvah preparation as such is being handled by the Cantor - by Messerschmidt in the Temple and the Cantor in the Shul. We are preparing only insofar as the reading readiness we give them.

F: Okay, now, you've got Orthodox and Conservative kids in the same classroom. [R: Yuh] Boys and girls, correct?

R: That's a good question, right.

F: What happens with the Temple girl who says to the Orthodox girl, "I am going to have my own Bat Mitzvah in six months," and the Orthodox girl says, "Oh, I am not going to do that. We are not going to have it this way. We will have a group confirmation." And the Temple girl says, "Yuh, and when I get older I am going to be called to the Torah, and I might even be a Rabbi." The Orthodox girl says, "You can't do that, because that is wrong." Does this sort of thing happen in the Hebrew School? There must be some discussion. There must be some controversy, because in my own classes a Conservative Jew sits over here and an Orthodox Jew sits over there. The Orthodox Jew tells the Conservative Jew that the Conservative Jew is not a Jew, and the Conservative Jew retaliates. This goes on in my classroom. I try to stop it because I don't want the gentiles to have a good time over this kind of controversy. Doesn't that occur in Hebrew School?

R: That's your class, okay? I would make two observations.

F: They are college students. This is not Hebrew School level.

R: Right. Yuh, we are talking now about children from eight through twelve, right? So my experience has been this. Number one, I would say that that type of discussion never takes place [F: Okay]. Number two, their experiences with each other, I would say, are mainly social and I would say that there is never this kind of competition. I would go on further to say that as far as my observations go, there is never any kind of a tug-of-war or any

clash between the individuals on the basis of Temple, Shul. Now let's take it a step further and direct it to the individual in the classroom, the teacher. What we have always done, and I think it is the only possible way you can handle it, we've always kept it on a general level. In other words, we teach an approach. One approach only. We teach the traditional approach because this is still the tradition. Reformed Judaism doesn't claim they have a tradition and Conservative Judaism may be building up a tradition, but even they subscribe to the norms, to the traditions. Kashruth is still kashruth, and Shabbat attendance is compulsory. One Rabbi will say, "We want you there, how you get there is up to you." The other one may not say anything but on a Bar Mitzvah day he will stay in the Shul until all his parishioners have driven off in their cars and then he will come out afterwards so that he won't be in a position of embarrassing or being embarrassed. So when we teach in the classroom, it is the traditional approach. If a child says to me, "What about lobster," we'll say, "Obviously, lobster is traif. What your parents choose to do, that is up to them. That is a decision that they have to make. The tradition is still this." Not only that, there are certain things that you do. The bracha is still said before you eat because that is not Conservative, it is not Reformed, it is not Orthodox. What you are doing is thanking God for the privilege of having something to eat. So we tackle it on the broad approach of the traditional form. [F: Okay] What the individual home does is up to them.

F: All right. Now I'm not done with you yet. I am going to push this because I know that this is working you awfully hard, in fact, it is probably killing you. But, I'm not going to let you go.

R: Right now I am numb, so just keep going!

F: I know I've got the feeling that if I just keep on a little bit longer, I could make it to the end [R: All right] without you giving up. All right, now, your major emphasis then has been the building of the Shul [R: Yuh]. And you've done a lot of things with the Hebrew School and Jewish education [R: Yuh]. You've always been involved in the Board of Jewish Education, haven't you?

R: Well, that was my function. I was Vice-President of education at the Shul.

F: All right. Now, as far as the Federation and the Community Center are concerned, you haven't participated in them, have you?

R: Okay, there again, we are talking about different things. I was on the Federation. I was on the Federation when I was a baleboss, when I was a member of the community. When I became a part of the faculty, then obviously I was not going to sit in deliberations which determined the things that I was doing. So I was off the Federation. A fellow was Principal of the Portland Hebrew School, Ruben Resnick, who is now a big wheel in education in one of the large communities like St. Paul, Minnesota. I met him at one of the conventions. At one time I was in charge of the Youth Commission for Jewish Education. But once I became involved in a teaching capacity, then obviously I didn't participate in those areas.

F: Now your sons, Steven and Daniel, were they Bar Mitzvahed?

R: Oh, yes. Steve, as a matter of fact, is a product of the Hillel Day School.

F: What about Cynthia?

R: Cindy went to Hebrew School. Danny went to Hebrew School.

Mrs. R: He taught them both.

R: I taught them both. It was an awkward situation but I was with them both in the Temple school. Danny was Bar Mitzvahed in the Temple and Cindy was Bat Mitzvahed. Steve, although he went to Hillel, was also Bar Mitzvahed in the Temple.

F: So on Yom Kippur or Rosh Hashanah we would have found the two of you and your kids in Temple Beth El?

R: In Temple, right, because when it was a community congregational school, obviously I would go there. Now, actually, I am a free-wheeler. Since I was in the school on the faculty, all these years I got honorary memberships in both the Temple and the Shul and so I gravitated. Leah was always comfortable in the Temple, but I used to go to both. I enjoyed the traditional service. I understand a lot of the Mishegoss, the foolishnesses that go on there. When they ask me, "What the hell are you doing in the Shul here?" I tell them that I am just slumming and stuff like this. There is this give and take, and I always felt comfortable because these are people I have known all my life here in Portland. Even on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur I go to both of them.

Mrs. R: Steven does, too.

R: Steve does, too. Steve was a product of the Shul. He enjoys the Orthodox, he likes the intensity of prayer there.

Mrs. R: Cindy was in the Temple Choir.

R: Yuh, right. Cindy is a product of the Temple and so is Danny.

F: So the three kids still have some . . .

R: They have some identification with the Temple-type service rather than . . .

F: But still they identify.

R: Oh, yuh, oh, sure. As a matter of fact Steve had been away from it for quite awhile. He works in Augusta and lives in China Lake, and he found himself teaching up there in Augusta. They didn't have any formal school up there, and a couple of times a week, Steve would be teaching the children of a couple of lawyers.

F: So your kids have a strong feeling about Judaism.

R: Yuh, well, yes, we do. Now even Danny, who has never been particularly close, when we sit down at a holiday meal or a Passover meal, he's right there.

Mrs. R: He went to Israel.

R: Yuh, he left school soon after the Yom Kippur war. He was in his sophomore year in school. The first thing we knew some big philanthropist was going to give him $600 to go to Israel. This man told Danny he was doing it in part because I was a fraternity brother of his from the University of Maine. So I called my fraternity brother and asked him to please not do me any favors. He says, "Maurice, you know I wouldn't do anything unless I consulted with you first." To make a long story short, Danny left school and came home. We told him if he was going, he would be going on his own. So he got himself two jobs. He got himself a job as a short-order-cook in the International Pancake House and at a gas station. He worked several weeks until he made enough money and he got a grant through that group in Boston that was helping the kids out, $300 or $400, and he went. He stayed there for five months and worked in a kibbutz. He was climbing trees but he didn't want that. He wanted to work in a kibbutz where they had mechanical problems. They didn't give it to him so he left the kibbutz and went to another place near Tel Aviv where he could do that. He left when he saw that there were enough kids coming over from England and they didn't need him anymore. On his way home he stopped off in Switzerland and did a little skiing.

Mrs. R: And now they are sending us to Israel, our three children.

R: Yuh, the three kids.

F: Oh, you haven't been?

Mrs. R: No.

R: Never been.

F: So they are sending the two of you.

R: Yuh, out of the clear sky they got together and they decided that this was what they wanted to do, so we are going December 16th.

F: Well, it is about time.

R: It is.

Mrs. R: Yuh, well, it is a lot of money.

R: They didn't decide to do it until recently.

Mrs. R: They have been saving a lot of money.

R: Yuh, I know.

Mrs. R: They gave us all the money for the total trip to Israel.

F: Okay. All right. Now, can you hang on five more minutes, sir?

R: I'm doing fine.

F: All right. You are interested in going to Israel, to say the least?

R: To say the least.

F: You are a Zionist?

R: Well, my father was a very active Zionist. As a matter of fact, the epitaph on his stone is "Hibbat Zion," devoted to Zionism.

Mrs. R: My father was a Zionist, too, wasn't he? My mother was.

R: Your mother, of course, was very strong Hadassah and very strong Council.

F: You say here that your mother's brothers and sisters were lost in the Holocaust. Do you assume that?

R: I didn't say that. If I did it's a mistake.

F: No, we write up things and we sometimes write them wrong.

R: As a matter of fact my mother has one sister and two brothers who are living in this country. One of them, the older sister, was lost in the Holocaust. Her older brother was a professor of mathematics under that government until about three years ago when he passed away. He came to visit us here in Portland and I took him over to the Temple. He was practically an agnostic, a boy who had a Rabbinical background in his bringing up. He was a part of the government for many, many years and taught in the University. Yet, when he came to this country I took him over to the Temple. I took him into the small chapel and took a sefer Torah out, unrolled it on the table, and that fellow read from the Torah the way a man did who had been reading for years. He knew it. It was a part of his background, and even though he hadn't used it for 30 years, he was fluent in it. I took him into the Rabbi's library and he saw a book in the original Yiddish. He took it out and opened it up and he read it. I wasn't looking for something like that. He happened to see the Yiddish title on it and so it was quite an experience for me and for him. He is gone now. The other two I told you about, the two brothers and the sister are in this country. They are the ones I told you who were very much interested in the new developments in Russia. They were confirmed all through the right-wing projects until the time that Hitler doublecrossed Stalin. Then,I guess, they all soured gradually. I guess that is when they lost a lot of them. Right now they are very much members of the establishment, prosperous and not particularly interested.

F: So you came from two immigrant people who had no college education and where Yiddish was spoken in the home , and every one of you in your family received a college education.

R: That was characteristic of most of the Jewish families.

F: Not so, that is more of a myth.

R: My contemporaries, certainly. My contemporaries for the most part, wouldn't you say so?

F: You are a first generation.

R: Yuh, well, so are my contemporaries.

F: Okay, that's true I suppose, because we are not interviewing your contemporaries.

R: Right, that's the point. Your exposure has been with the generation before us.

F: And you come from a very religious home with at least background [R: Yuh, right] in the Rabbinical tradition. Yet your kids all went to school [R: Yuh]. You carry out the educational tradition now, but the formal observance tradition has in part gone. Actually, not as much for you as for many, many of your contemporaries [R: Right, right] and your sons are not as lost as many.

R: Certainly not with the oldest. The oldest is still very close to it; the others peripherally.

F: Okay. Now, why do you believe Israel is so important?

R: Well, of course, for me it's a miracle in my time. The thing that I feel is the fact that after all these years, being acquainted with the liturgy and knowing what the prayers are, to see Israel reestablished, that is a tremendous thing. It is the great miracle. Not only that. As a first generation Jew I know the stature that it has given me individually as a Jew. There is no question about it. I am out a lot. I deal almost entirely with non-Jews and my relationship with them is an unusually good one. I am living in the kind of State that is a Yankee State. My business is completely in Maine and New Hampshire and they are a breed unto themselves. I feel very, very comfortable talking about my religion, talking about my traditions, and in a sense even educating them about Judaism. For the most part they are interested. I do business with a fellow in Kennebunkport who runs a drugstore who is an Albanian, and we compare customs, we compare traditions. It is really a beautiful thing. The fact that I can impart these things gives me a great deal of comfort and security. The thing that runs through the whole thing is that Judaism has always been an enjoyable experience to me. I've always had a great deal of pleasure. No insecurity really, because I have been able to fend for myself. I've had pleasure. The word we call it is naches and naches can be from children, it can be from your own exposure. Basically this is what Judaism has been for me. All the good things, all the customs, all the traditions related to the observances - these are things that have meant a great deal to me. It has been unusual for me, too, because

I have been a part of more than one generation. I have identified all my life with the generation who preceded me so that I was able to sit down with Abe Levey and talk about the old days, sit down with old man Crasnick, sit down with Saul Shulman and these people knew me just as intimately as I knew them. So I was a part of two generations. The joy of being a Jew came from their generation as well as my own. I think I probably got more in this respect from that generation than I did from this generation. It was a carry-over that made it all the more pleasurable.

F: All right. In the new book written by Irving Howe, of which you have a copy [R: Yes], he has done a remarkable thing in writing the history. There are some problems with it because he writes only about New York and he draws conclusions that what is true there applies everywhere in America. That simply is absolutely not true. The Jewish experience in New York is a very different thing. It was bad enough working in rags and bottles, but it was not the same as working in a sweat shop.

R: I agree with you, I agree with you. I don't believe that in any large city, be it New York or Boston, that the average individual had the same relationship to his religion that people do in a small town. I think most of them are far removed from it. My feeling has always been that I have been fortunate in being in a small community because the exposure was greater, the contact was closer and more intimate, and I got far more from it than my contemporaries, for the most part, did in the very large communities, especially New York. I'm leaving out Williamsburg and those areas, of course.

F: Now, I want to quote something from Howe and I want to ask you a question afterwards. He says in there, "that immigrant Jews taught their children both to conquer the gentile world and to be conquered by it." Now, are you someone who worries at night or when you are driving down the road - surely you've got to do a lot of things when you are driving down the road 90,000 miles a year - about assimilation and intermarriage?

R: Well, I am concerned about assimilation. I've thought about intermarriage. As a matter of fact, I've been exposed to many of the possibilities. However, one of the things that sustains me is the fact that I feel that with my children close enough to us and to our religion through us, that even in the case of intermarriage, we've long ago made our peace. If it happens, the only thing that we ask is that the children get the right kind of mate.

F: You're not going to disown your sons?

R: Oh, we are far from that.

F: Some of your friends have.

R: Oh, I am well aware of that, but I don't think that this is the norm today. They used to sit Shivah in the old days, too. That's gone by the board. But there is no question in our minds. We have made many accommodations that we don't even consider accommodations. We are looking at the partner. We also feel in the case of the children that they are close enough to the home so that even intermarriage will not mean a dissolution of their ties. We don't have any fears. Let's face it. As a matter of fact, we actually feel that the chances are greater for intermarriage than against. In terms of my own children, their exposure for the most part is with non-Jews. We feel that it is a question of time. However, we have seen possible partners and we know that the children know how we feel. I think that the only question in our mind would be the choice of partner.

F: So you are not worried about Judaism disappearing?

R: Well, my own personal feeling is that in the near future it is not going to happen. Now, I know it is happening around us. I also know that what's happening has never happened before. I know that, for example, there is a greater identification today. There are many groups that are more intimately exposed to it, and my feeling is that it's not the end. I know the previous generations have faced the same question, and I think that the chances are pretty good for a strong Judaism. Maybe not in the same forms. There will be accommodations. I also say to myself, "Look, we are not unique. Religion is undergoing the same thing all over the world today. We are not exempt or immune." What did Hitler say about give me five generations or something like that? My feeling is that there is greater attention to education today. Federations all over the country are spending a great deal of money. Even though money by itself is no criteria, at least some of it is getting through. So I feel there is a great deal of hope for the future.

F: All right. Well, I have two final questions. One of them is again using a quote from Irving Howe. He talks about the old immigrant Shul and then he talks about a Temple. He says, "A Temple is a very different thing. It's a secularized community center, a low-pressured and undemanding religiosity that stresses good works, liberal ethics, Jewish responsibility with a minimal religious identification." I'd like you to tell me if you agree with this.

R: Well, listen. I am going to speak in positive terms in disagreeing with him. I happen to be in a good position to make an evaluation. I go both to the Shul and I go to the Temple. I've had a great deal of pleasure from the Shul. There is a new Cantor there and I enjoy it a great deal because it's a part of my background and my milieu. But, by the same token, I also feel that there is nothing more inspiring than some of the services that Kurt has in the Temple. I think when you sit down for neilah at the end of the Yom Kippur service, that that is the most beautiful thing that I have ever heard. I think that they have done a great deal of conservation, because they are certainly a group of people who would have been lost completely if it weren't for groups like the Temple. Without them it would have been catastrophic. Look, there are many complaints that you could have about the goals and objectives of certain individual Rabbis, but I think that the Temple has done a tremendous job. Let's face it, we know that very, very quietly the Shul has done a great many things that the Temple has been doing for years. By the same token, I think the reverse is true. I think that the Temple does a beautiful job. I think that when it comes to religiosity, the Shul can learn a great deal from the Temple. The climate in the Shul is only for most of them who preceded me, and it's not calculated to win friends because it is like a classroom. If you don't create the climate for teaching you are not going to have it, no matter how good the man is in front of the desk. The same thing is true with the Temple. If you don't have the climate for it, you are not going to do anything. I think that when you go into the Temple, it is a religious environment and atmosphere. In certain areas they do a beautiful job. Some of it leaves me cold because I think it is a little bit cold, but some people don't want more than that. Maybe I am expecting what I want. I am wrong to try to superimpose on them my objectives.

F: The Yom Kippur service, for anyone who is of a Conservative Jewish nature or a non-Jew, has to be the most beautiful religious service of any faith.

R: Georgeous. I've gone to Westchester Reformed where my sister goes and that is one of the loveliest ones in Westchester county. It's a beautiful service. When I go there it's usually for an occasion, and I am a guest of honor. Number one, they know I am teaching. Number two, I've got a little background so I'm always called up to the Torah there. You know, when I go up to the Torah there, I don't wear a hat, because to me, that's just a form and it is more important to identify with my sister and my brother-in-law than it is for me to be a big shot and wear a kipa to show that I am so religious that I have to

wear a kipa. I make the broche and to me it is not a sacrilege. I don't feel it's a sacrilege. If their tradition is not to wear a kipa, fine.

F: If you were called to the Torah and a woman was called up with you, what would you do?

R: Oh, that's ridiculous.

F: No, it is not ridiculous.

R: Well, it is to me.

F: You'd be surprised, you'd be surprised.

Mrs. R: We went up to the Torah [R: Yuh] together when our children were Bar Mitzvahed.

R: Yuh, right. I had forgotten about those things. I shouldn't say it is ridiculous. Those are the little things that don't bother me. My reason is that there is no reason in the world for women not to do those things. The rationale for women not doing things has long disappeared. Women were never educated. When they weren't educated they couldn't participate. So now that they are, they are emancipated and there is no reason in the world why a woman shouldn't be a president or a woman shouldn't participate in the service. These are things that I take very, very lightly, and don't bother me.

F: Okay, I have a final question and it is the hardest of all. You've given 75 percent of the answer so far . . .

R: I'm going to plead the fifth on this one [All: Chuckle]. I am entitled once!

F: The question is not as stupid as everybody reminds me it is each time I ask it.

R: Well, I haven't made a judgment.

F: Which means I have an incredibly strong ego after 45 of these interviews.

R: How many, 45?

F: You are about the last one. I want to know what being Jewish means to you. I understand a lot of what you've been saying [R: Yuh, a lot of it I have already given you], I've been taking it in. Five minutes ago you described a good deal about it [R: Yes, I did], but I want to get back down to some other things. I am reminded of a favorite author of mine who writes these remarkable Jewish detective stories. Wednesday the Rabbi did this [R: Yuh, and his new one]. I read the new one, and in it

Rabbi Small is describing to some of his board the difference between Christianity and Judaism. He says Judaism is based on ethics and morals and with Christianity it's mysticism. That is what he says. Let's set that over here [R: Yuh]. Now, when you think of being Jewish, do you identify with it first of all in your heart? We are talking about the heart now, I'm not interested in the mind [R: Yuh]. In your heart do you feel something for Jews all over the world? Do you feel a part of them?

R: You just pressed the button - YOU JUST PRESSED THE BUTTON! Why? Because this is what I tell my gentile friends. I say, "There is a difference I feel." I've got a current events group and I said that to the children last week. There is a difference in being a Jew. Okay, we went through all this other stuff about being in Europe, and that is one of the reasons I fell into this thing naturally. I don't feel anything heroic about it. I'm glad I did it, I think, when I look back on it. It's hard to believe, and I'm thrilled that I did it, and I think that it was a lot to do at the time. But I didn't feel any of those things. At the time I was doing it for them because I am a Jew and they are Jews. My feeling is that this is something the Jews have for Jews all over the world. This is one of the beauties of being a Jew. I might be presumptuous, but I don't think a Catholic feels this for another Catholic, and I surely know that a Protestant doesn't. No matter where I went and no matter where anybody went, if it's a Jew I don't care what his estate is. I don't care what he looks like, and I don't care what his color is. The very fact that he is a Jew makes me want to be at one with him. I would feel very, very badly if I went to his place of worship and I was rejected. By the same token, if there was anything that I could do, I would do it automatically.

F: When you read about good Jews in the newspaper, does it make you feel proud?

R: Well, obviously. Obviously, yuh.

F: And when you read in the newspaper about bad things happening to Jews or about bad Jews . . .

R: I feel ashamed, yuh.

F: So it's a feeling.

R: Of course it's a feeling. A deep seated feeling, right. No question.

F: All right. Now, let's go another way [R: Yuh]. Let's think about your parents [R: Yuh] and your grandparents. Can you visualize in your mind the Old Country? You've never been to the Old Country. You talk about tradition and the old-timers around here [R: Yuh]. Now, do you have a feeling for the Old Country and their Jewish life? You know something about the history. Do you think about that sometimes?

R: I sure do.

F: Do you make pictures in your mind about their life?

R: I sure do. I'll tell you why I do. It seems to me when I fantasize about those things that life over there must have been a beautiful thing. There were none of the outside exposures. Okay, they were in a shtetl, they were in a ghetto, if you please. By the same token, for many of them, it was a beautiful ghetto. It wasn't until this generation came along with their agnosticism and their haskalah that they started to question. For the period of time that they didn't question, with all the deprivations, with all their inadequacies, it was a beautiful life. Even though I don't go to Shul every day, this business of going to Shul each day, the business of participating in communal activities is appealing. I have all the creature comforts, and it would take a pretty strong-minded person to say I would swap what I am doing. I don't think I would, but in terms of their existence I think it was beautiful.

F: And you feel part of that existence two generations ago?

R: Well, of course, we are brought to that by many things today.

F: But you feel it?

R: Of course I feel it.

F: It's mystical, then.

R: Because this was a part of my background. I've got a shtetl background. When you talk about their experiences, when you talk about the things they do, many times you can see yourself doing them. You say to yourself, "Well, okay, it is the way it was ordained that I be born a generation later." But when I picture my uncle growing up there, even with all the problems . . .

F: You picture him in your mind doing things.

R: Doing things, right. Going through different activities and his exposure there. Of course I can picture the Cheder. I was a part of it with all the kids sitting there and the Rebbe with his long beard and his dirty shirt and a stick in his hand. Well, I had the same thing with a guy here. He would get angry and he'd hit me. When I'd go home I'd never tell my father about it because if I told my father about it, I'd get it a second time at home. He wouldn't think to question the teacher, ipso facto. I was responsible. If I was responsible, I'd get it when I go home. Today, God forbid anything happens. You have to answer to the parents. The parent automatically takes the child's side. These are only little things, but for many of us it's a continuity. It's a continuum, as Rabbi Sky would say. This is one of the things about Judaism. Things never change. Many things are the same as they always were. This feeling of one Jew for another, the identification. How else could you account for UJA or JDC? This is a unique situation. It is unique to the Jews. It's the only thing. Now, this is not to say that the Greeks don't identify or the Italians do not identify. We know about the empathy they have with the Old Country, but not to the same extent. We have a culture and a tradition and a daily life which is a constant identification. I think this is one of the beautiful things about it.

F: So you have all this. I want to ask about one more element [R: Yuh]. Then for you, it is obvious and it's obvious to me, God is in your life?

R: I hesitate to equate these with God. I am a part of two generations and maybe more of the superstition has left me. God is mixed up with metaphysical and everything else. It's mixed up with understanding and it's mixed up with superstition. The force itself I hesitate to identify. I know there is a force and I pray to that force. There is some force, call it God. The word itself is not something that I use too readily. I know there has got to be a force that created a situation where after 2,000 years we are back in Israel. Yet, whoever heard of anything like that? It's something above and beyond ourselves. The first generation may have used that word all the time. I don't use that word as readily.

F: But it's a force.

R: It's a force, yuh. I recognize a force. I recognize it is not of our own doing and there is something that has brought it about - something that has created a situation and something that takes

care of us all over the world. To come out of the Holocaust, and a remnant to be able to go to Israel and to come to this country - something was at work. Something rescued us from Hitler, something sent Hitler the same way that Hamen went. There is a force, of course, there is a force. I just don't use the word "God" as readily.